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Disrupting Cis/Heteronormativity and Interrogating Whiteness: The Advancement of
Counseling Through Critical Sex Education

A Dissertation
submitted by

Carla R. Rosinski, LMHC, CST

In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

LESLEY UNIVERSITY
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Division of Counseling and Psychology
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This dissertation, titled:

Disrupting Cis/Heteronormativity and Interrogating Whiteness: The Advancement of
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**as submitted for final approval by Carla R. Rosinski under the direction of the chair of the
dissertation committee listed below. It was submitted to the Counseling and Psychology
Division and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
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Ericka Hart and their interview with Jimanekia
Andrew Gurza of Disability after Dark podcast
Dalychia Saah of Afrosexology and her interview on Sexology

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To my dissertation committee:
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I wish my parents were here for this. I miss you both daily.

Dedication

In gratitude and solidarity with the generations of activists and community organizers who fight
daily for equity and justice

Abstract

This dissertation provides a critical analysis of how cis/heteronormativity is reproduced and/or challenged in sexuality and gender discourses. Additionally, this research aims for critical consciousness raising and serves as further evidence of the need to integrate critical human sexuality training in counselor education.

The meta theoretical orientation of this research combines liberation psychology, queer and Crip theories, and critiques of settler colonialism. These theories combine to illustrate the "wheel of domination" created by colonialism, capitalism, and white supremacy.

Critical discourse analysis is utilized with naturalistic occurring data in the form of Podcast episodes on the topics of 'sex ed' and 'sex and/or relationship advice'. The results of the analysis are presented in three parts: sex mis/education, discourse that lacks a structural/power analysis and discourse that contains a structural/power analysis. Ultimately, the critical analysis of cis/heteronormativity illuminates its function in preserving the cultural/sexual ideology that supports the creation and maintenance of systems of oppression including racism and ableism.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In their 2020 Presidential Address for the APA Society of Counseling

Psychology, Anneliese Singh calls for liberation as a key value in the field of Counseling

Psychology and reflects on the path "behind us, under us and before us" (Singh, 2020, p.

1110). In doing so, they acknowledge the ongoing work of critical scholars who have

advanced counseling psychology through challenging the norms in our field which are

rooted in "white-bodied supremacy, cisgender and straight dominance, able-bodied,

wealth supremacy, and more" (p. 1112). Although this research was set in motion long

before Singh gave this presidential address, this research is aligned with their call for a

counseling psychology of liberation and aims to challenge such norms through disrupting

cis/heteronormativity and interrogating whiteness as a structure. Through a critical

analysis of how cis/heteronormativity is reproduced and/or challenged in everyday

sexuality and gender discourses, this research serves as critical consciousness raising and

further evidence of the need to integrate human sexuality training in counselor education.

It is a significant event for a presidential address to exhibit such clarity and deep

commitment to addressing the areas of our field that have fallen short. A commitment to

liberation moves us beyond the frequent debates of "whether or not we should engage in

advocacy or social justice" and calls for the embodiment of practices that free us all from

systems of oppression (Singh, 2020, p. 1113). Although social justice has been a core

value of counseling psychology since its inception, the majority of foundational theories,

practices and research has been rooted in an Eurocentric and androcentric paradigm, in

other words, from the perspective and benefit of white cisgender men (Chang & Crethar,

2010; Crethar & Ratts, 2008). Additionally, it has been well researched and documented

that efforts to address these foundations and meet the commitment of social justice has

often been superficial (Goodman et al., 2015). The impact of this results in clients being

compelled to "sacrifice identities and histories in favor of pseudo adjustments to the

dominant culture traditions" (Marsella, 2015, p. vii). This has caused disproportionate

harm for communities that have been historically marginalized, including Black and

Indigenous communities, other communities of color, disabled communities, and the

LGBTQ+ communities.

A commitment to social justice in our field includes addressing our clinical

education and training programs. The critical analysis of the sociopolitical origins of

mental health theories and practices has illuminated the potential for clinicians and

interventions to reproduce the power relations and belief systems from which these

foundational theories and practices emerged (Smith, Chambers & Bratini, 2009).

Therefore, it is vital that counselors engage in ongoing personal work and reflection to

interrogate and dismantle their own biases in order to provide treatment that is not

compromised by the sexist, racist, classist, ableist and heterosexist biases embedded in

mental health practices and society (Smith et al., 2009). As such, the standards for

professional counseling outlined by the major governing boards require knowledge in

strategies for identifying and eliminating barriers and prejudices, including processes of

intentional and unintentional oppression and discrimination. Counseling programs are

mandated to instruct students on a variety of life experiences and promote "resilience and

optimum development and wellness across the lifespan" (CACREP, 2016, p. 11).

However, despite these mandates, programs for clinical mental health, college and school

counseling lack any requirement for human sexuality training (Sanabria & Murray, 2018).

The following chapters will illustrate that the lack of attention to human sexuality and the oppressive normativity embedded within dominant cultural discourse of sexuality and gender is at odds with the commitment to social justice in the field of counseling psychology. Without attention to education in human sexuality, counselors are at an increased risk for replicating systems of oppression. On the other hand, clinicians are in the unique position to disrupt cis/heteronormativity and support clients overall wellbeing. In assisting the readers' orientation to this research, I offer a quote from an interview with adrienne maree brown, the activist scholar and author of *Pleasure Activism*: "Pleasure is one of the basic human rights that gets stripped away from us in oppression, so women of color are often twice removed from feeling good. Sex is part of what can make us feel so good, but only if we're in our power in it, which means being informed, healing, being open, and talking about safety and delight" (Harris, 2019). This research explores the barriers of accessing pleasure, power and healing, beginning with an introduction to sexuality and wellbeing.

Sexuality and Wellbeing

At a very basic and fundamental level, the concept of mental health is a state of wellbeing and the field of counseling therefore aims to create a healthier society (Crethar & Ratts, 2008). The World Health Organization (2006) states that sex and sexuality (which includes asexuality) are fundamental parts of the human experience, impacting psychological health, relationship satisfaction and overall wellbeing throughout the lifespan. Sexuality and sexual health extend beyond acts of sex and includes relationships with others, relationship with one's own body, and access to pleasurable and safe

experiences that are free of coercion, violence and discrimination. Sexual health is fundamental to overall health and wellbeing, extending beyond the absence of infection or disease (World Health Organization, 2006). Unfortunately, in a field that is tasked with the protection and cultivation of wellbeing, very few counselors obtain basic training and education on human sexuality. For example, an analysis of the American Counselors Association (ACA) and the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) Syllabus Clearinghouse revealed that 9.4% (57 out of 394) included the word "sex," but less than 1% (4 out of 394) had specific focus on sexuality (Diambra et al., 2016). Often, the courses that address sexuality are "special topics" such as working with LGBTQ+ clients, or discuss sex only in relation to medical or psychological illness which reinforce sex-negative approaches (Cruz, Greenwald, & Sandil, 2017; Sanabria & Murray, 2018).

Multiple mental health disciplines have identified the need for clinicians to move beyond pathology based models of sex and sexuality and towards sex-positive models which support sexual health and wellbeing (Burnes, Singh & Witherspoon, 2017a). Unfortunately, the field of counseling has lagged behind in both attention to and the training of sex-positive sexuality in counselor education (Burnes, Singh, & Witherspoon, 2017a; Burnes et al., 2017b; Mosher, 2017). The lack of sex education in counseling mirrors that of the general population across the lifespan. As a result, mental health professionals often play a role in replicating and perpetuating socially-constructed norms and have historically done damage in the areas of sexuality, gender and relationships (Donaghue, 2015).

The prevailing oppressive ideology and notions of normativity that surround gender and sexuality are so deeply entrenched in our lives and learning, that it requires a great deal of intentional unlearning and deconstructing of assumptions which often remain invisible due to their ubiquitous nature. Marchia & Sommer (2017) articulate this well: "Normative behaviors are perpetuated through forms of social policing. Explicitly and implicitly, certain forms of social behaviors are normalized and rewarded within and outside of institutions, while alternative behaviors are discouraged and penalized in the social sphere" (p 1). Clinicians are in a unique position to help disrupt gender and sexuality from oppressive normativity. Unfortunately, clinicians are part of the same sex-negative and cis/heteronormative society as their clients. Without any intentional study of human sexuality, many graduate programs are not providing the training or opportunity for clinicians to dismantle these messages, putting clinicians at risk for perpetuating harmful cis/heteronormativity with clients, creating distress and harm (Burnes, Singh, & Witherspoon, 2017a, 2017b).

Just as Singh stated is true for our field, this research – as well as the literature contained within it – outlines how the dominant cultural norms and understanding of sexuality and gender are rooted in "white-bodied supremacy, cisgender and straight dominance, able-bodied, wealth supremacy, and more" (Singh, 2020, p. 1112). Singh reminds us that history will remember the things in our profession we chose to change, and "the status quo we decided to not question and continue to uphold" (p.1112). In short, this research interrogates the status quo, through dominant cultural ideology of cis/heteronormativity.

For the purposes of this study, cis/heteronormativity describes a set of "societal assumptions and norms which are based on heterosexual, cisgender experiences, influenced by social biases, privilege and stereotyping" (Carrotte et al., 2016, p.1). Therefore, cis/heteronormativity is not simply the privilege of heterosexuality or cisgenderism, but a ubiquitous "force in which heteronorms are linked to social oppression" (Warner, 1991). Pervasive cis/heteronormative beliefs and practices saturate dominant cultural beliefs, impacting policies, practices, and individual values. These beliefs assume the myth of binary gender identities and heterosexuality as the norms and extend into all areas of life including family structures, relationships, beauty standards, and ableist notions of worth and bodies (i.e. Arvin et al., 2013; Smith & Shin, 2015). Policing and practices throughout our culture favor these "norms" to the extent that others have been pathologized, criminalized and legislated against. As quoted by Smith & Shin (2015) "heteronormativity is everywhere. It is already in our collective psyches, social institutions, cultural practices and knowledge systems" (p. 1460). This research aims to illuminate the ongoing pervasiveness of cis/heteronormativity, the harm it causes, and the ways in which clinicians can challenge cis/heteronormativity in clinical discourse for the purposes of supporting the health and wellbeing of clients, and in the service of collective liberation.

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this research is twofold. It serves as critical consciousness raising of the pervasive and oppressive normativity that is embedded within dominant cultural discourse surrounding sexuality and gender, which this research has termed cis/heteronormativity. Secondly, the purpose of this research is to illustrate the need for

clinicians to have critical human sexuality education as a vital competency in supporting

mental health, wellbeing and dismantling systems of oppression. The critical analysis of

cis/heteronormativity illuminates its function in maintaining the cultural/sexual ideology

that supports the creation and maintenance of racial and sexual regulations. Chapter 2 of

this research will outline how these regulations function to support the larger "wheel of

domination" which includes white supremacy, capitalism and colonization (Mayra,

2020). Ultimately, critical consciousness raising and promoting critical sex education

serves the commitments Singh (2020) outlines in their "top 10" next steps, specifically:

[a] decolonize and re-indigenize counseling psychology; [b] center Black liberation in

everything we do; [c] name, interrogate, and unlearn internalized whiteness; [d] uplift

liberation of Black and Brown trans women and nonbinary communities; [e] recognize

the patriarchy is harmful and has lasting effects; [f] find ways to live in our bodies more;

and [g] know that another world of liberation is possible and then build this within

counseling psychology (Singh, 2020).

Research Question

This dissertation is guided by the main research question; "How is

cis/heteronormativity reproduced and/or challenged in everyday sexuality and gender

discourses?" which leads to the sub-question of "how can clinicians reproduce and/or

challenge cis/heteronormativity in sexuality and gender discourse?" These questions aim

to explore dominant culture narratives and the interrogation of whiteness through

discourse of sexuality, gender, sex, and relationships.

Researcher Positionality

In many ways, I entered into this dissertation research long before I entered into a

formal doctoral program. My positionality as a white, nondisabled, cisgender, queer,

woman has (mostly) afforded me privilege, access, and advantages that are entirely

unearned. Additionally, in more ways than not, I am part of the dominant culture and

absolutely benefit from the systems of oppression that exist within it. My positions of

privilege have allowed me access to stable and secure housing and nourishment, an

education, and therefore my career in mental health. These, among many other things that

I value, contribute to my ability to access health and wellbeing. However, it has been the

intentional examination and unlearning of dominant culture norms and messages that has

truly made the most impact on my own mental health and wellbeing. The implicit

messages that have accompanied these positions of privilege include assumptions of a

hierarchy of knowledge, what and *who* is deemed legitimate, valuable and "correct."

However, as I came out as queer in my adolescence, I sought out community in the

counterculture of queer and HIV activism and found it was the very knowledge that

dominant culture and privileged positions had deemed "illegitimate," that has been the

most valuable in my personal and professional development, as well as any experiences

of joy, pleasure and fulfillment. I do not make this statement to diminish complexity and

nuance, or to romanticize any position or experience of oppression or inequity and

injustice. I make this statement to help orient the reader towards challenging the notion of

normativity as any relation to, equal to, or determinant of "health."

Professionally, I am a certified sex therapist and licensed mental health clinician

with over 20 years' experience, most of which I have spent specifically serving the

LGBTQ+ communities, particularly transgender and nonbinary communities, their

families, and partners. My professional trajectory from HIV activism and education

during the mid-1990s led to reproductive justice, sexuality counseling and comprehensive

(sex-positive/LGBTQ+ affirming) sex education. These areas intersect in many ways, but most importantly the frameworks of justice from which the work occurs. Commitments to anti-racism and anti-oppression in all forms, following leadership from within the community, and prioritizing (and compensating) lived experience are values I feel fortunate to have learned at early age. I carried these commitments as I worked in community mental health for over a decade before I simultaneously opened my first private practice in 2011. My personal and clinical work has highlighted the deep shame and pain that accompanies cis/heteronormativity, which we all share to varying degrees of experiences and understanding. I have also experienced and witnessed the potential for healing and liberation that comes with dismantling and unlearning oppressive normativity. This is something that has been evident across my clinical experiences. It serves us all. While my primary commitment has been to the harm done to queer and trans communities, particularly communities of color, I can attest to the fact that those in the dominant culture – those with privileged identities and positions – are also struggling with the cultural scripts that maintain their positions of privilege and power. This has been especially evident in my work with white, heterosexual cisgender men. Long before I knew it to be true, bell hooks explained "the first act of violence that patriarchy demands of males is not violence toward women. Instead, patriarchy demands of all males that they engage in acts of psychic self-mutilation, that they kill off the emotional parts of themselves. If an individual is not successful in emotionally crippling himself, he can count on patriarchal men to enact rituals of power that will assault his self-esteem" (hooks, 2004, p. 66).

On Interrogating Whiteness

In many ways this research is my own attempt at going backwards before I can move forward. This has been a process of investigating and building upon the wisdom, knowledge and ideas that have deeply influenced my development over the years. Despite thousands of hours in education, training and supervision within the vast universe of sexuality and gender that I have engaged in over the years, there is always so much more to learn, but most importantly; to unlearn. Although it seems obviously naïve now, it took me many years to understand that if I had not sought out such learning and unlearning, I may not have been exposed to it in counselor education. This is particularly true for the interrogation of whiteness, both within sexuality and as an organizing structure of our culture, which the upcoming literature review of Chapter 2 further explores. When predominantly white institutions and groups carry a value of social justice, there often seems to be a limit at which they/we are willing to go. The examination of white privilege, for example, has often been facilitated through a lens of inclusion and exclusion, but rarely challenges the fundamental assumptions of whiteness (Ahmed, 2017; Arvin et al., 2013; Tuck, 2013). Tuck (2013) names this as a fear of alienation for the white settler, and the protection of settler futurity. In other words, an investment in the continuation of the status quo over the true commitment to dismantling of systems of oppression and collective liberation.

In a list of the "top 10" next steps for collective work towards liberation, Singh lists #8 as the call for the naming, interrogation and unlearning of internalized whiteness and a "break with white solidarity" in counseling psychology (p. 1116). In developing as a critical scholar and researcher, I have continuously struggled with what I have come to understand that which Singh labels as "white solidarity" in my professional communities,

formal education, and within myself. At the center of white solidarity is often alignment

with power structures and the protection of whiteness, white fragility and white rage

(DiAngelo, 2019). Through the critique of cis/heteronormativity, challenging the

fundamental assumptions of white supremacy culture is at the heart of this research.

These fundamental assumptions include but are not limited to individualism, either/or

thinking, the concept of objectivity or neutrality, and the right to (white) comfort (Okum,

2001)

> To paraphrase Freire (1970), whiteness does not have enough distance from itself

to have any meaningful understanding. Therefore, I recognize that I will continue to

make mistakes, and I also commit to continued accountability to them. I recognize that

any deep learning or insight that I have gained in my examination of whiteness has been

because of those who have a bit more distance, specifically Black and Brown trans

women and femme folks, and their generosity in sharing such wisdom and knowledge

with me, both in relationships and through their words on a page.

On Settler Colonialism

> White settler colonization has done a thorough job of erasing and rewriting

histories over and over in the service of white supremacy, and patriarchal capitalism

(binaohan, 2014). Therefore, as a white settler, I have been deprived of the history,

knowledge, experiences and wisdom outside of the white, European, colonizing gaze. It

takes considerable effort to access history of gender and sexuality that is not just "white

lies" (binaohan, 2014, p 73). Therefore, despite intention and commitment, I am aware

that this work is mitigated through the colonized perspective and/or position. Because my

formal education has been centralized within the field counseling psychology, I have not

been adequately exposed to or emersed within decolonizing theories or methodologies to the extent that I could hope or assert that this work would contribute to any decolonizing efforts. However, this research does align with Indigenous feminist scholarship calls for the challenging of heteropatriarchy, and this work aims to be a sustained denaturalizing critique against settler sexuality (Arvin et al., 2013; KE 'Infoshop, 2019; Morgensen, 2011). Rather than omit settler colonialism for fear of falling short or making mistakes, I believe it is more important to include it in efforts to resists fear and the comfort of whiteness/privilege/silence, and to be accountable to my mistakes and short comings. In truth, settler colonialism cannot be separated from a critique of power. The colonial tools of heteropatriarchy and heteropaternalism remain at work today and were functioning long before European settler colonialism. The lack of attention to understanding these issues in my own education reinforces reasons it must be included (however imperfectly) here.

Tuck (2013) writes that there are some stories that the academy has not proven itself to be worthy of knowing. Her statement is specifically referring to the stories and experiences of Indigenous people but is also relevant to other communities that are most impacted by systems of oppressions. As clinicians, we are often invited to hear some of these stories and experiences, but I assert that Tuck's statement towards the academy also applies to us. As clinicians, as a field, what stories have we not proven ourselves worthy of knowing?

Significance of Study

The concepts and ideas in this research are not new. I am simply attempting to integrate various bodies of work and wisdom to be located within a document positioned

in counseling psychology. The understanding that social and systemic oppression is

directly linked to an individual's ability to access health and wellbeing is pretty basic for

any Indigenous reader. However, it takes science and research a long time to catch up to

Indigenous knowledge (Mayra, 2020). Additionally, queer and trans activists, critical

disability activists, scholars in Black feminist thought, critical sex ed and Indigenous

feminists (among many others) have been talking about sexuality as the site of

oppression, and its connections to capitalism and colonialism for decades, and in many

cases, centuries. Perhaps then, the significance of this research is situated within the

historical time that it has occurred, and the ongoing need for counseling to engage deeply

with this work.

I wrote the initial research proposal for this project during June 2019, the 50th

anniversary month of the Stonewall uprising where drag queens and trans women of

color, particularly Black women, rioted against discrimination and police brutality in

New York City. Stonewall has been cemented in US history as vital to the movement for

LGBTQ+ equality and human rights and marking the first Pride. Every year in June, we

gather in our respective cities for a pride march and celebration, which, with each

subsequent year, seems to resemble the event which inspired it less and less. Those in the

front line of the movement – gender queer and trans folks, particularly BIPOC folks –

have been left behind. The fight against police brutality and discrimination, the goal of

equity and justice, has been deeply conflated with a desire to be a part of normativity; the

goal of diversity and inclusion. The cause of justice and equity has been taken over by

corporate sponsorship for one month a year, and Pride events are precipitated by the high

policing sweeps to "clean up" the "undesirables" such as people who are homeless, for fear they might damper the façade of festivities.

Although *Homosexuality* was removed as a disorder from the Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM) 46 years ago, it wasn't until the 50th anniversary of Stonewall that professional psychological organizations, such as the American Psychoanalytic Association finally began to come forward with official apologies for the way the field has contributed to inequity, discrimination and trauma against LGBTQ people (Trotta, 2019). This is not enough. Meanwhile, transgender and nonbinary individuals continue to be highly discriminated against in employment, housing, schools, healthcare and the military. Therapists continue to lack education and engage in gatekeeping practices that impact access to trans affirming health care and surgery. Anti-transgender rhetoric and stigma create barriers in virtually every aspect of life, contributing to high numbers of poverty in transgender and nonbinary communities (Badgett et al., 2019). The policing of normativity contributes to discrimination and stigma, leading to high levels of violence towards the transgender and nonbinary communities, particularly for Black trans women and other trans people of color. Since 2008 alone, the murder of over 3664 transgender and gender-expansive individuals have been reported worldwide (TDOR, 2020). These murders are often categorized as violent overkill, which means the use of methods that exceed what is necessary to kill a person. There is no way to accurately ascertain how many others go unreported. The intersection of Black and trans/feminine remains the most dangerous intersection in the world.

One year later, in June 2020, ongoing police brutality and murders of Black and Brown people has finally brought the Black Lives Matter movement into the national

conversation, though often in derogatory ways. I am writing from my home office in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, where we have labeled low wage positions such as janitorial and food services as "essential" – a word that finally establishes their importance yet simultaneously devalues their lives by mandating they put themselves at risk for the benefit of the greater "community." Hundreds of thousands of people (mostly BIPOC) have died from COVID, and yet hundreds of thousands of people (mostly white) refuse to take the basic precaution of wearing a mask. The collective commitment to safety and the protection of our most vulnerable is "inconvenient," and somehow a threat to their freedom and human rights. The freedom and rights that they actively vote against for those who are different than them. *This* is normativity. Therefore, attempts at challenging and dismantling normativity are always significant.

Theoretical Framework

This research is guided by a theoretical framework of Liberation Psychology, queer and Crip theories , and settler colonialism (Arvin et al., 2013; Kafer, 2013; Martín-Baró, 1996; McRuer, 2006a; Morgensen, 2011). The synthesis of these theories provides a metatheory that reflects the wheel of domination comprised by white supremacy, capitalism, and colonialism (Mayra, 2020). Cis/heteronormative narratives and ideas function within this triad to regulate and maintain sexuality and gender as a site of oppression.

These critical theories share a commitment to interrogating and understanding the way power and privilege operate and understanding the role of historical epistemological violence in research (Fahs & McClelland, 2016; Teo, 2010). In alignment with this theoretical position, this research utilizes the priorities of critical sexuality studies as

outlined by Fahs & McClelland (2016). They propose three epistemological priorities of conceptual analysis, attention to abject bodies, and challenging of heterosexual privilege, which will be further defined in Chapter 2.

Language and Definition of Terms

There is ongoing debate and constant movement within communities about strategies and preferences regarding language use. To the best of my ability and knowledge I have chosen to use language and terms that have been identified by the people and/or communities to which they refer, not outside academics or aspiring allies. At the same time, no community is monolithic, and the best practice is to follow the language of the individual with whom you are speaking to or referring to. As an example, I use "disabled person" as opposed to "person with a disability," because disability justice activists have chosen this as preferred language based on the principles articulated in disability justice frameworks. However, if a speaker in the data identifies themselves as a person with a disability, I reflect their self-identification and person-first language in my writing. In all instances, I support writing practices that seek specificity and respect self-identification, as a form of "orthographic justice" which "recognizes and reclaims what was stolen from individuals and thereby their descendants" (Mack & Palfrey, 2020).

It is also important to note that my decisions to capitalize or not, are not arbitrary. At the time of this writing, there is ongoing debate about the use of capitalization when referring to groups in racial, ethnic, or cultural terms (i.e. Bauder, 2020; Laws, 2020; Mack & Palfrey, 2020). In this moment and for this research I have chosen to capitalize words that refer to racial, ethnic and cultural groups, but not to capitalize white. The reason is that language conveys values and can support or challenge the systemic

oppressions and injustices it may seek to dismantle (Mack & Palfrey, 2020). Those who

support the capitalization of 'white' state that by not treating the word white the same as

other racial or ethnic identifiers, whiteness is reinforced as the norm or standard, which

ignores the specificity and significance of whiteness, and allows it to remain neutral

(Mack & Palfrey, 2020). Those who oppose the capitalization of white state that "white

doesn't represent a shared culture or history in the way Black does" (Bauder, 2020) and

that the capitalization of white is universally done by white supremacists and could subtly

convey legitimacy or alliance with such beliefs (Bauder, 2020; Laws, 2020). While I

agree with both of these positions, I do not believe that we are collectively at a place

where the decision to capitalize white provides more orthographic justice than the

decision to not. Therefore, white is not capitalized throughout this work in the way Black

or Indigenous, as example, are.

　　　Definitions of concepts and terms are woven throughout this dissertation.

Language is ever evolving, and the choices I make in this document could easily be "out

of date," depending on the time in which this is being read. To begin, there are several

terms that are helpful to define and can serve to orient the reader. The following

definitions are from the list of key terms in Transgender Studies Quarterly (Whittington,

2014) unless otherwise noted.

　　　Cisgender – (from the Latin *cis*, meaning "on the same side as") refers to

individuals whose gender identity is "on the same side as" the sex which they were

assigned at birth. Emerging from trans activist discourse in the 1990's, the appropriate

use of the term helps distinguish expansive and diverse identities without reproducing

unstated norms attached to cisness.

Cisgenderism –defined as the cultural and systemic ideology that endorses and perpetuates the belief that cisgender expressions and identities are to be valued more than transgender or gender expansive identities and expressions. Cisgenderism creates an "inherent system associated with power and privilege" (p.63). Important to note is the embedded sexism and trans misogyny that are present within cisgenderism.

Heteronormativity –the "system in which sexual conduct and kinship relations are organized in such a way that a specific form of heterosexuality becomes the culturally accepted 'natural order'" (Whittington, 2014, p.210). Heteronormativity is imposed through material, or economic and legal, structural, physical, and symbolic violence. Smith & Shin (2015) further explain that the use of the term underscores the invisibility and ubiquitous nature of cultural messages and policies that perpetuate heterosexual supremacy. It exists in the 'collective psyches, social institutions, cultural practices and knowledge systems' (p. 1460).

Sex positivity – is a term that acknowledges there is no one definition of "normal" and that human sexuality is diverse and broad (Queen, 2014). It is a term for everyone, a construct that "invites us to acknowledge that pretty much any fully consensual behavior might be right for someone, and pretty much nothing is right for everyone" and an idea that "can't be fully expressed outside of an atmosphere/context of consent. Informed, non-coercive consent" (Queen, 2014).

The Indigenous Feminist zine, titled *Settler Sexuality* provides a list of key terms and definitions that are also relevant to include here (K'E Infoshop, 2019, p.3). The following definitions come directly from this publication:

Settler colonialism – the ongoing process of non-Native settlers occupying Native land, demanding their world views, morals, and economies be followed, while attempting to erase and assimilate the original inhabitants

Heteropatriarchy – The societal structure in which heterosexual men possess the most amount of control and power compared to womxn and queer people, who are disempowered by the system

(the spelling of "womxn" used here is meant to denote all women and femmes)

Imperialism – policy, action and ongoing process of extending power over foreign land and people often with the violent intent to control affairs

Capitalism – an economic and political system in which a country's trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit, rather than by the state or by the people, exchange relies on currency, overall system relies on individualistic thought and competition

Subjectivity – ideas, perspectives, feelings, experiences, and desires of an individual/collective expressed with agency and consciousness

Queer – unspecific non-heterosexual identity/subjectivity, cannot fully describe Indigenous perspectives of gender/sexuality

Neoliberalism – hyper-capitalism; deregulation of the market, free-market capitalism alongside liberal agenda to erase race and homogenize queerness

Decolonization – the action and practice of dismantling harmful structures of power, reclaiming previous subjectivities, and envisioning a future built on previous and current understandings of compassion, relations and accountability

>**Indigenous feminisms** – intersectional theory and practice of decolonial
>feminism, directly challenges settler-colonialism, capitalism, and western
>conceptions of "gender" and "sexuality"

I recognize that identity systems and categories are woefully insufficient to capture the complexity and nuance of the multiple positions and identities we each hold, and that most of these categories rely on "binaries, boxes and spectrums (which are further grounded in binaries)" (Kattari, 2019, p. 136). I strive to support what Kattari (2019) proposes as "an identity galaxy" which allows for individuals to contextualize and locate their whole selves in ways which are not boxed in by socially prescribed constructs. And considering that our language is currently insufficient for the galactic nature of identities, I use the term "nonbinary" throughout this work to expand the binary limitations of cisgender or transgender in reference to what I am communicating. However, this term is not sufficient for the galaxy of identities and as stated, I always use the identity, language and labels of the speaker. In this research I reflect my position that all who locate themselves as "woman" (for example) are women. Therefore, when I use the term woman, for example, I use the expansive meaning: all women. When it is pertinent to specify cisgender, transgender and/or nonbinary I have done so.

Summary of Design

The design of this research is guided by a critical epistemology and methodology which directs research towards social change through the analysis of power and oppression, and a commitment to disrupt inequities (Carspecken, 1996; Ponterotto, 2005). This research involves a critical analysis of discourse found in the public domain of podcasts which are directed at providing relationship advice and/or sex education.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a theoretical approach and methodological framework which focuses on the analysis of spoken or written texts and studying the role of language in society (Given, 2008; Motschenbacher, 2014; Wodak, 2001). CDA primarily studies the ways in which "social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (van Dijk, 2005, p. 349). Podcasts are an example of naturalistic occurring data versus data that is generated by research (Lester & Paulus, 2014). The use of podcasts as a data source allows for the data to be samples of conversations that are accessible to and directed towards the general population, thus may be more relevant or reflective of dominant cultural narratives. The method of analysis in this work integrates Critical Discourse Analysis with the methodology of critical qualitative inquiry outlined by Carspecken (1996). Analysis of transcribed podcasts episodes involved a preliminary reconstructive analysis which includes initial speculations of the meanings and interactions in the data, and "reconstructs" implicit or tacit understandings into explicit and articulated interpretation (Carspecken, 1996). The implicit and explicit content of the discourse was categorized, coded and analyzed through emersion in the hermeneutic process outlined by Carspecken (1996) and ongoing interrogation of knowledge claims, cultural typifications, multiple meaning fields. In alignment with the critical perspective in which this research is grounded, this inquiry identifies implicit and explicit power, and the structural analysis of capitalism, settler colonialism, and white supremacy that manifests, and is reproduced on the individual and relational level as it pertains to discourse on sexuality, gender and relationships.

Summary of Findings

The results of the data analysis are presented within three chapters of findings, Chapters 4, 5 and 6. These chapters have been organized under the umbrellas of sex mis/education, discourse that lacks a power or structural analysis, and discourse that contains a power and structural analysis. The topic of sex mis/education is present in both the foreground and background of the data analyzed and findings of this research. In the foreground, the lived experiences of receiving sex-negative education, or no sex education at all, are reported in explicit terms and presented in Chapter 4. The findings in Chapter 4 also include the characteristics of what "normativity" communicates by way of sex/miseducation. This includes the implicit and explicit binary gender lessons that promote normativity as rape culture, sexual assault, and silence through the erasure of consent and agency for anyone outside the experience of a cisgender man. The role of religion and the cultural push for "purity at all costs" highlights racialized hierarchies and dichotomies, which are also explored through the experiences of the sex educator. The experiences of sex educators and examination of whiteness that is infused within the field provides a backdrop for Chapter 5 and 6.

Chapter 5 presents analyzed discourse from podcasts episodes where there is a no structural analysis provided by the speakers in their presentation of information or in the advice or "answers" for listener questions. The invisibility of whiteness and lack of structural analysis in this chapter reinforce the question of who has access to sex and pleasure, and who is allowed to be sexual. The "advice" provided by the guests and hosts of the podcast discussion functions to support the listener in adjusting to or aligning with cis/heteronormativity. Chapter 6 provides a strong alternative to Chapter 5 by presenting

discourse which contains strong structural analysis and challenging of power, specifically of whiteness.

Overview of Dissertation

This chapter provides an overall introduction to this dissertation research and an orientation for readers to the motivation and purpose of this research, as well as the development and design. In Chapter 2, I provide a detailed overview of my theoretical orientation which includes liberation psychology, queer theory, Crip theory, and Settler Colonialism, and the specific liberatory practices outlined by Singh that are relevant to this research. The synthesis of these theories creates the wheel of domination of white supremacy, capitalism and colonialism through which dominant cultural narratives and normativity have weaponized sexuality, gender and relationships (Mayra, 2020). The literature review continues with relevant research on the conceptual analysis of biopower and sexuality as a site of oppression; tracing settler sexuality, colonialism and the creation of citizenry to capitalism, patriarchy and anti-Blackness as "science." The review of literature includes regulatory practices, the history of psychology and sexuality, and concludes with sex education across the lifespan and in counselor education.

Chapter 3 outlines my critical epistemology and methodology which guide this work, including additional reflexivity statements and initial methodological reflections, data collection and methods of data analysis, validity strategies, ethical considerations, and limitations. In Chapter 4, 5 and 6 I present the findings of sex mis/education, discourse that lacks structural analysis, and discourse that contains structural analysis, respectively. Finally, in Chapter 7 I provide discussion and meta reflection of key findings and support the claims that the lack of sex education is at odds with the

commitment to social justice. I then present the implications of this research offer

considerations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter begins with an outline of the theoretical framework of this research, which is based in liberation psychology and infuses queer theory, Crip theory and the interrogation of settler colonialism (e.g. Arvin et al., 2013; Martín-Baró, 1996; McRuer, 2006a). The triad of white supremacy, colonialism and capitalism is presented as the wheel of domination (Marya, 2020) and a cultural framework for understanding and exploring the path of sexuality and regulatory practices through history and the modern day. In societal attempts to regulate sexuality, the characteristics of the dominant groups or practices are rarely seen as criminal or pathological, despite how 'acceptable' individual sexual practices have changed and continue to change over time (Moser & Kleinplatz, 2005). This study aims to shine the investigative flashlight on these dominant characteristics as critical consciousness raising in challenging the status quo and interrogating assumptions of a relationship between the status quo and the presence of "health."

Beginning with multidisciplinary literature on the concept of power and sexuality this chapter follows a funneling of concepts at an ideological and cultural level, to regulatory practices at the structural level and then to the interpersonal level to illustrate the intersections of cis/heteronormativity with racism, classism and ableism. A literature review of the heterosexual script and implications of heteronormativity on behaviors and self-concepts of cisgender heterosexual research participants provides further information of the impact that extends to all members of society (i.e. Kim et al., 2007). To further locate this work within the field of counseling psychology, a history of psychology and sexuality includes the subjugation of knowledge in mental health and use of the DSM in the practices of oppressive normativity and pathologizing. Finally, a review of the

literature of sex education across the lifespan, the lack of clinical training in sexuality, and implications for clinical practice is followed by literature calling for training in human sexuality in counseling psychology. This chapter concludes with an overview of the critical sexuality studies framework that guides the analysis of this study (Fahs & McClelland, 2016).

In positioning the importance of sexuality in anti-oppression efforts, McRuer (2006) quotes disability activist Anne Finger who said:

> Sexuality is often the source of our deepest oppression; it is also the source of our deepest pain. It's easier to talk about and formulate strategies for changing discrimination in employment, education and housing than it is to talk about our exclusion from sexuality and reproduction (p.107)

This quote locates sexuality as a site of deep oppression and pain, which is disproportionality reflected in experiences and positions that have been marginalized, such as a disabled experience. The realm of sexuality extends into every aspect of culture and life. And yet in clinical settings topics around sexuality are often avoided by the therapist. Additionally, sex and sexuality can be the most difficult topic for clients to communicate about, which is reinforced by client experiences with clinicians' discomfort and lack of competency is topics of gender and sexuality (Cruz, Greenwald & Sandil, 2017; Miller & Byers, 2009). The lack of sex education across the lifespan in the United States positions clinicians at a disadvantage and deficit of knowledge before they even enter counselor education programs, and the literature reflects they are not met with curriculums and training to address this incompetency (Burnes, Singh & Witherspoon, 2017b; Mosher, 2017; Reissing & Di Giulio, 2010).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this research incorporates liberation psychology, queer and Crip theories , and the Indigenous study of settler colonialism. In the "top ten" priorities towards building a counseling psychology of liberation that Singh outlines in their presential address, efforts to "decolonize and re-Indigenize counseling psychology" and "center Black liberation in everything we do" are at the top of the list (Singh, 2020, p.1114, 1115). The theoretical framework of this research aims to incorporate these priorities through the use of these theories which are intrinsically tied to one another by virtue of their critique of normativity, and denaturalization of cis/heteronormativity and the wheel of domination of white supremacy, settler colonialism and capitalism. Beginning with an introduction to liberation psychology, and brief commitment statement of collective liberation, this section then outlines queer and Crip theories and settler colonialism.

Liberation Psychology

Liberation psychology is a critique of the field of psychology and the ways in which it has contributed to oppression. Psychology has often presented Eurocentric perspectives as ahistorical and universal facts (Martín-Baró, 1994). Liberation psychology began in the 1970s amongst a group of Latin American psychologists who critiqued the field of psychology for its assertion of universality, value of neutrality, and societal irrelevance. Ignacio Martín-Baró was a Spanish born Jesuit priest and psychologist who dedicated his work to the struggle for peace and justice and the collective resistance to oppression by the people of El Salvador (Martín-Baró, 1994). Ultimately, he paid for his resistance with his life in 1989 when he was assassinated.

Martín-Baró (1994) examined psychology within its own history, noting it is a young science, and the social structures which it is embedded. Psychology fashioned itself after the natural sciences, "dressing up in lab coats and collecting instruments to play the part of a discipline investigating truth" (p.3). Despite its mission to guide people towards understanding themselves and to enjoy a "normal" life, psychology only could see a small piece of what was there and strictly ignored the social and economic conditions, and therefore structural determinants of daily individual or group life. Martín-Baró asserted that self-knowledge requires an understanding of social experience and that the role of psychology should be to assist people in understanding their realties and reflecting upon their own social experience (Martín-Baró, 1994). He argued that in its effort to create an image of what it means to be human, psychology effectively erased the "very real things that of life that make up what we are as a human being" (p5). The bias towards individualism and ahistorical understandings allowed psychology to create a flat image and idea of an individual, devoid of structural cultural influences, mechanisms of control, and hegemonic power. In his introduction to the collection of Martín-Baró's work, Mishler (1994) beautifully illustrates the implications of this:

In this distorted picture…we cannot hope to comprehend ourselves and our realties, but perhaps what is worse, we are likely to accept what it says about us as right and immutable, for once the existing stereotypical order is consecrated as natural, what you see is what you get: women are weak, campesinos are fatalistic, men attract women or they do not; North Americans are rich and can eat, Central Americans are poor and cannot (p. 5)

The distorted picture that psychology creates becomes conflated with what is "natural" and becomes a barrier to understanding ourselves and our realities. This quote illustrates the need for sociopolitical and cultural interrogation must be tied to self-knowledge, and the results or efficacy of self-reflection can vary greatly with the absence of the larger, structural knowledge.

Liberation psychologies acknowledge the interconnectedness of all oppressions and privilege the experience of historically marginalized voices and subjugated knowledge. Martín-Baró wrote of a liberatory psychology that breaks "chains of personal oppression as much as the chains of social oppression" (Martín-Baró, 1994, p.27). While this "personal oppression" could be understood as "internalized oppression" such as concepts of internalized homophobia or internalized racism, I assert that particular attention is needed in examining the privileged position in connection to its chains of both social and personal oppression. I situate this in connection with the field of psychology and the position of mental health professional which will be explored at length in this chapter. Martín-Baró (1994) asserted that when psychologists ignore or are unaware of the oppressive structures that influence client mental health, they become agents of societal oppressive systems. This is particularly true surrounding the topics of sex, sexuality and gender (which, this chapter will illustrate, are inherently racialized concepts). For example, Singh (2016) illustrates how the tenets of liberation psychology can be used by mental health professionals to shift work between cisgender therapists and transgender and nonbinary clients from affirming practice toward liberatory practice. Central to the distinction of "affirming" to "liberatory" is the examination of cisgenderism, for example, as an unexamined position and mechanism which subjugates

or oppresses a transgender experience, and also limits and negatively impacts cisgender

experiences (Singh, 2016). This shift can be illustrated by the following quote:

> If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have
>
> come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together
>
> (Aboriginal rights group in Queensland, 1970s)

This quote challenges the position of "helper" and the hierarchy it implies, as well as the

way this hierarchy falsely absolves the privileged position of examination of deficiency.

However, this quote also illustrates a layer of subjugated knowledge. The quote is often

attributed to Lila Watson, a Murri (Indigenous Australian) artist, activist and scholar who

used this quote in a speech she gave to the United Nations in the 1985 (see Leonen, 2004;

Mz. Many Names, 2008; Alice, 2017). She has repeatedly asked that this quote be

credited and cited to the Aboriginal rights group of Queensland (of which she was a

member), as the group collectively came up with this phrase in the 1970s, and she is not

comfortable being credited as author. However, the citation of a collective versus

individual is often deemed insufficient in terms of academia and the American

Psychological Association (APA), creating one of two outcomes – students will use an

incorrect citation that ultimately perpetuates white supremacy culture, or they will be

asked to simply remove the phrase from their writing, both of which should be

unacceptable. This highlights the issue of power and privileging of "western" normativity

in the form of individualism that Martín-Baró challenges in psychology. For me, this also

indicates how hegemonic U.S.-centric norms and ideals are inherently limited and

lacking in capacity to reflect complexity and connection (and ultimately health), which

this research eventually demonstrates.

Commitment Statement of Collective Liberation

This research strives for alignment with collective liberation through the critique of oppressive normativity. I am committed to a critique of psychology and mental health as they reproduce oppression. Additionally, I am aware that mainstream or academic discourse of liberation often omits an analysis of active settler colonialism and anti-capitalism. This omission can function to maintain and naturalize settler colonialism, and then (by design) racism and other systems of oppressions. Indigenous scholars have warned against assumptions that concepts of liberation inherently support decolonization, as in movements that advocate towards inclusion or normalization in the existing nation state (Arvin et al., 2013; Morgensen, 2011; Tuck, 2013). Therefore, particularly from my position as a white settler in the United States, it is necessary to include multidisciplinary theories and extensive philosophical interrogation of the very nature of the things "that of life that make up what we are as a human being" (Martín-Baró, 1994, p. 5).

To counteract the individualism and ahistorical understandings that are foundational to the field of psychology, it necessary for this research to include historical overviews of sexuality as a site of oppression and its connections to settler colonialism, white supremacy and capitalism. My theoretical orientation is presented by scaffolding the examination of complex concepts and theories. Because my formal education has been limited the field of psychology, and specifically counseling psychology, the product of my attempts to integrates these concepts will inherently be inadequate. My aim is to contribute to the bodies of work that illustrate the importance of inclusion for these multidisciplinary concepts in counseling and psychology education. The following sections provide an overview of queer theory, Crip theory and settler colonialism which build upon the integration of liberation psychology in this research.

Queer Theory

Queer theory provides a foundational orientation of my theoretical framework and the critique of power and normativity. At a very broad level, queer theory is the interrogation of normativity and the assumptions that are embedded within societal notions of what is accepted as normal. Through critique of structures such as heterosexuality, capitalism and patriarchy, queer theorists aim to expose and destabilize the complex intersections of social power and social identities (McRuer, 2006b). Queer theorists have led the way in interrogating how identity categories such as heterosexual have covertly imposed the assessment of what it is to be normal in society (Smith & Shin, 2015). By rejecting binaries and questioning normative assumptions about identity, gender, and sexuality, queer theory seeks to disrupt rigid normalization into expansive possibilities that exist beyond binaries (Meyer, 2007). However, queer theory is not about identity categories, nor is it synonymous with gay and lesbian studies. Queer theory "displaced the description of sexual minorities in gay/lesbian studies by theorizing heteronormativity as a power relation that conditions all subjects and social life" (Morgensen, 2011, p.20). Powerful social and institutional discourse of capitalism, religion, medicine, psychiatry and psychology bolster heteronormativity as a powerful matrix that structures society (Stein, 2008). Queer theory interrogates these structures and mechanisms of oppression, and asks us to interrogate our thinking and assumptions – even if/when they already appear to be non-normative (Fryer, 2012).

However, literature in heteronormativity is often limited in its analysis by falsely excluding race, disability, and class, thus failing to address the power structures that are at very basis of its origin (Smith & Shin, 2015). In my use and interpretation of queer theory, race, class and disability status are inherent to cis/heteronormative structures. In

this research, I use the term "cis/heteronormativity" to describe the current day system of oppression which combines cisgenderism and heterosexism that are inherently racist, classist and ableist. Cis/heteronormativity is directly tied to capitalism, and the commodification of bodies for profit that support the nation state. It is also directly linked to Western colonization, state sovereignty and the formation/control of a citizens and citizenship. Therefore, in this research I am integrating interdisciplinary theories on knowledge and power, gender and sexuality, and settler colonialism to place cis/heteronormativity as power structure that perpetuates white supremacy culture and thus inherently unhealthy for all peoples.

Crip Theory

Crip theory lies at the intersection of queer theory and disability studies, further challenging normativity through "compulsory able-bodiedness" which masquerades as "the natural order of things" (McRuer, 2006a, p.1). Crip theory builds upon the concept of compulsory heterosexuality to include and explore compulsory able-bodiedness (McRuer, 2006a). The concept of "compulsory heterosexuality" (Rich, 1980) outlines that heterosexual relationships are the only sanctioned social arrangement which deems acceptable sexual and relational behaviors for binary cisgenders. Rather than being "natural" or intrinsic in human instinct, Rich positions heterosexuality as an institution imposed upon societies and cultures dictates what is "normal" in sexual and romantic encounters (Rich, 1980). Woven together with the system of compulsory heterosexuality that produces queerness, compulsory able-bodiedness produces disability (McRuer, 2006a).

Queerness and disability are therefore inseparable, in that these compulsory systems are contingent upon each other. Most importantly, these systems are inextricable

from capitalism as the market driven priorities of capitalism have "imagined and

composed sexual and embodied identities" (McRuer, 2006a, p. 2). McRuer emphasizes

an "analysis of materialism and capitalism as the site of production where both images

and identities are produced (McRuer, 2006a, p.78). Similar to queer critiques of gay and

lesbian studies, Crip theory critiques normalcy beyond the social construction of identity

categories. Additionally, queer theory and Crip theory agree that efforts for inclusion into

normalization is not the goal, instead it is the dismantling of the normalization itself.

McRuer argues against the focus on representation without an analysis of the on the site

of production. In other words, to focus on inclusion at a local level without addressing the

larger sociopolitical structures is not sufficient. A powerful site of the production of

queerness is settler colonialism.

Settler Colonialism and Heteropatriarchy

In alignment with the interrogation of normativity and connections to capitalism,

settler colonialism refers to the ongoing process of non-Native settlers occupying Native

land, attempting to erase and assimilate the original inhabitants by demanding settler

world views, morals, and economics be followed (K'E' Infoshop, 2019). The literature in

Indigenous studies and Native feminist theory uses the term heteropatriarchy to describe

systems of domination through sex and gender that are employed by colonial settlers on

Native lands (Arvin et al., 2013). Colonial heteropatriarchy redefines "embodiment,

desires and kinship" to eliminate Native cultures, "control racialized populations" and

secure a white settler society (Morgensen, 2011, p. 20). The heteropatriarchal power of

white supremacist settler colonialism produced both nonnormative and normative identity

labels we use today (Morgensen, 2011). Indigenous scholars and activists position the

critique of heteropatriarchy, which includes challenging heteropatriarchy as simply a

colonial legacy, as crucial to struggles of decolonization (Arvin et al., 2013; Morgensen, 2011; Tuck, 2013). In other words, heteropatriarchy is not limited to its use in colonization, but was employed as a strategy on within the society and citizenship prior to/outside of colonization and is ongoing today.

Native feminist theorists engage with the deep connections between settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy. They address two significant intertwined ideas that go overlooked in feminist discourses: the first is that the United States and other western countries are actively, not just historically, settler colonial nation states; secondly, settler colonialism had always been and continues to be a gendered process (Arvin, Tuck & Morrill, 2013). Indigenous perspectives on feminist theory have critiqued the academic consideration or understanding of colonialism as an historical point from which our society has progressed, rather than the still existing structure of settler colonialism and its effects on both/all Indigenous peoples and settlers (Arvin et al., 2013). Ultimately, settler sexuality was deployed as a fundamental tool of colonization, but its origin and use are not limited to colonization. Therefore, Indigenous feminist theorists state it is "intellectually and politically imperative" to tend to the links of colonization in the study of gender and sexuality (Arvin et al., 2013, p. 8). An understanding of the historical roots of modern-day notions is imperative to this research and a critical discourse on sexuality and gender. This is further illustrated in the upcoming section under the conceptual analysis of sexuality and power.

The focus on settler colonialism is the study of culture of dominance that is deployed upon Natives and non-Natives, albeit in varying forms. Considering colonialism as an event or placing it in the past, perpetuates the displacement of native people and

further naturalizes settler colonialism. Indigenous scholars have outlined how settler colonialism is naturalized "whenever conquest or displacement of Native peoples is ignored, appears necessary or complete" (Morgensen, 2011, p. 39). Native peoples are still here, despite the ongoing and historical efforts of erasure. Therefore, the challenging of settler colonialism requires the understanding it is an ongoing and active structure and system of domination that demands a "sustained denaturalizing critique" (Morgensen, 2011, p. 20; Wolfe, 2006). This includes the denaturalizing critique of whiteness.

        In an extensive review of Indigenous and colonial studies, Morgensen (2011) amplifies the need for analysis to displace accounts of colonization and resistance that normalize whiteness, noting:

>   White radicals often fail to note the racial specificity of their settler colonial
>   inheritance. If they project their experience into theorizing the responsibility of
>   non-Natives to demonstrate Indigenous solidarity, they may reproduce white
>   supremacy by not considering how people of color negotiate settler colonialism-
>   perhaps within Indigenous solidarity that white people will not share (p. 44)

Therefore, as a non-Native and white settler my role lies in contributing to the sustained denaturalization critique of settler colonialism, not in developing or dictating alternative structures. Central to a sustained denaturalizing critique is the interrogation of whiteness.

        Arvin, Tuck and Morill (2013) state the need to interrogate everywhere what Rey Chow the "ascendancy of whiteness," a concept denoting the multiple ways that the condition of being white, and enjoying the nationalist privileges of that whiteness, is made to seem neutral and inviting or inclusive of racial, sexual, and other minorities (Chow, qtd. in Arvin et al., 2013, p. 105; see also Puar 2007). They write:

By being included (whether by choice, coercion, or force) in whiteness, a wide

array of Indigenous peoples, people of color, and queer communities are given the

"opportunity" to take part in the settling processes that dispossess just such

"other-ed" peoples globally. Such opportunities include everything from

participating in the global War on Terror, as scholars like Jasbir K. Puar (2007)

brilliantly critique, to naturalizing and maintaining settler colonialism in the

United States. We argue that allying one's self with feminism should not require

consenting to inclusion within a larger agenda of whiteness; indeed, we believe

that Native feminist theories demonstrate that feminisms, when allied with other

key causes, hold a unique potential to decolonize the ascendancy of whiteness in

many global contexts (p.10)

In alignment with these statements, this research seeks to contribute to the interrogation

of whiteness and the ascendancy of whiteness in the field of counseling. The theoretical

framework of this work is further demonstrated through the wheel of domination, which

illustrates the intersections of queer and Crip theory and interrogation of settler

colonialism.

The Wheel of Domination: White Supremacy, Capitalism and Colonialism

The theoretical framework of queer theory, Crip theory and settler colonialism

cumulates in understanding the wheel of domination. In a presentation about

decolonizing medicine and the path to liberation through medicine, Dr. Rupa Marya

states that we cannot reform systems that were built on racism and violence, they instead

must be uprooted and built anew (Marya, 2020).

In outlining the interconnections and interdependence of colonization, capitalism and white supremacy, Mayra (2020) presents the image included here as Figure 2.1 of the wheel of domination and exploitation with the outcomes of trauma.

Mayra presents this information in the context of medical issues and illnesses' shared component of inflammation, and the research that is "just starting to parse out how social stressors and the very structure of society contributes to and exacerbates that chronic inflammatory state" (Mayra, 2020, para. 22). Within psychology and mental health there is also a great deal of literature and research that identifies the pathogenic influence of structural oppression on emotional health and wellbeing (i.e. Fox et al., 2009; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010; Smith et al., 2009).

Figure 2.1 The Wheel of Domination

COLONIALISM

SUPREMACISM ← CAPITALISM

SLAVERY → CHEAP LABOR

GENOCIDE → "RESOURCE" GRAB

WHITE SUPREMACY

"INVISIBLE" LABOR

MALE SUPREMACY AKA PATRIARCHY

FEMICIDE/DV CHILD ABUSE → TRAUMA

HUMAN SUPREMACY → ECOCIDE → INFLAMMATION

EXPLOITATION OF "RESOURCES"

Rupa Marya, MD
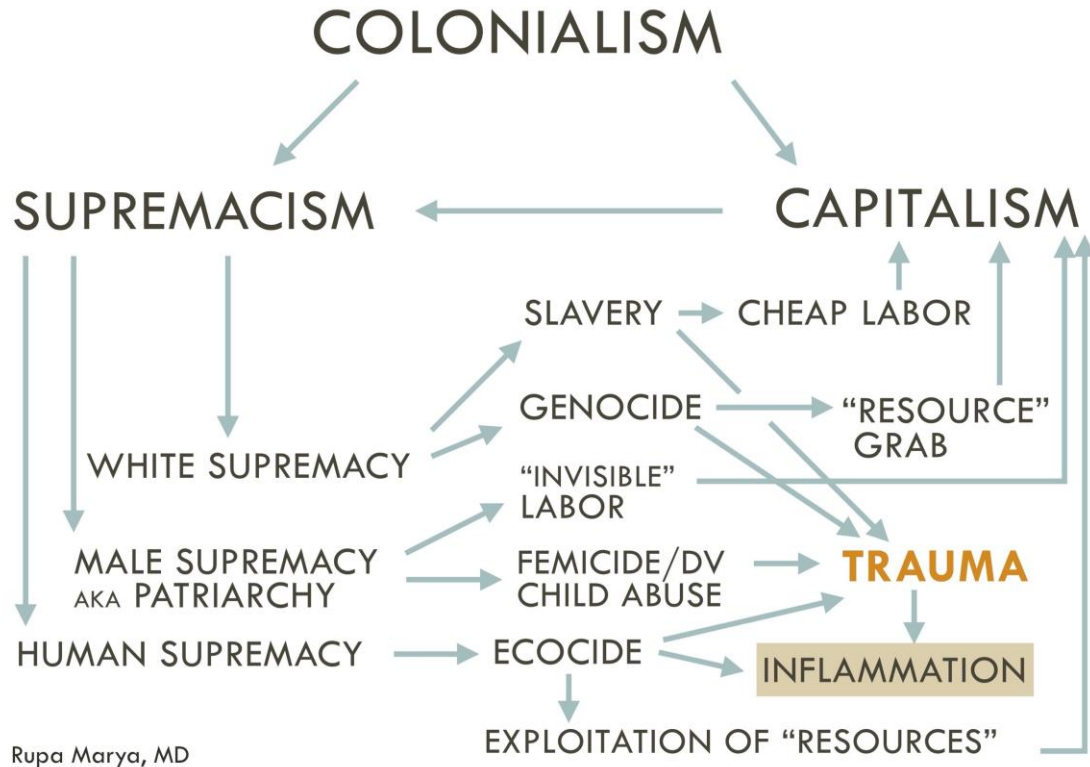
Note: Figure 2.1 from Rupa Mayra, MD (Mayra, 2020)

The wheel of domination illustrates how white supremacy and colonization legitimized slavery and genocide, which produced cheap labor and "unlimited" resources; both of which are necessary for a functioning capitalist society (Mayra, 2020). As capitalism continues to function and prioritize bodies as "producing", it bolsters the legitimacy of white supremacy and colonization. This literature review further illuminates this wheel of domination as it functions behind and within concepts and discourse of sexuality and gender**.**

This wheel of domination reflects a triangle that the United States is built upon and is still evident today: "the industrious settler, the erased/invisible Native and the own-able and murderable slave" (Arvin et al., 2013, p. 6). Each position is dependent upon the other and active in interactions. These triangulated histories cannot be separated. This research therefore will attempt to provide a foundational understanding of settler colonialism, settler sexuality, anti-Black racism and capitalism as cultural hegemony in modern notions of gender and sexuality or perhaps as the meta theory for what informs the dominant cultural understanding of gender and sexuality.

Integrating queer and Crip theory with settler colonialism provides the metatheory and framework for interrogating cis/heteronormativity in discourse and the orientation of the analysis in this dissertation work. These histories, theories and concepts are relevant to the critical consciousness raising of this research, however, the practical applications and impact of disruption on the local level will become clear in the analysis of this research throughout Chapters 4, 5 and 6. To further explore this wheel of domination, the following sections will provide both an historical timeline and overview of literature which beings with the deployment of settler gender and sexuality as tools for domination

in colonization and capitalism. This provides the foundation for the exploration of

capitalism and anti-Black racism as the basis for science and exploitive experimentation

in the United States and other western cultures. These influences are directly related to

current day understandings of sexuality and gender, and the ongoing commodification of

bodies and desire under capitalism. These foundational histories are important to outline

in understanding the far reach of cis/heteronormativity as a matrix of oppression. The

following sections will build upon this orientation by providing an historical overview of

power functioning at the ideological and structural levels, followed by regulatory

practices at the social level and then sexual behaviors at the interpersonal level.

Conceptual Analysis of Sexuality and Power

In dominant cultural discourse, the cultural specificity of sexuality and gender as

sexual ideologies is rarely examined and part of the conversation. Historians and

anthropologists understand sexuality as the cultural beliefs and practices that surround

sex. It is not possible to possess an understanding of the mechanisms of gender and

sexuality without including the racialization of such systems. Feminist anthropologist

Ann Stoler (1989) is often attributed with being the first non-Native to assert that

racialized notions of gender and sexuality were foundational to colonization, not just a

byproduct of it. However, Indigenous and Native peoples do not require anthropologic

translation of this truth, and as one settler colonial critique states: "I cite Native queer and

Two-Spirit people as critical theorists of their own…and whose claims still retain the

power to interrupt it" (Morgensen, 2011, p. 37), Therefore, as a white critical theorist I

can only interpret this western anthropological "discovery" as highlighting the hegemonic

power, and invisibility of the racialized nature of sexuality and gender in western lives,

cultural contexts, and local histories. The following subsections examine concepts of

power and the deployment of power through settler sexuality and creation of citizenry,

capitalism and anti-Black "science" that are foundational to the medical model and by

association, psychology.

Biopower

At a very basic level, the concept of power can be understood as the ability to

achieve an individual's own will despite the resistance of others. From a critical

epistemological perspective, which is further explored in Chapter 3, the nature of reality

is that power dynamics infiltrate all our experiences (Carspecken, 1996). Power infiltrates

structural, institutional, relational and individual levels of experience. In addition, all

thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations that are socially and historically

constituted (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994). For example, as a key organizing principle in

society, cis/heteronormativity and whiteness function as "neutral," or an invisible

"default" against which all else are "othered" (Arvin et al., 2013; Foucault, 1978;

McRuer, 2006a). Default positions are positions of power, simply based upon the fact

that they allow for the ability to achieve that of one's own will.

Foucault used the term "biopower" for the first time in the last of his college

lectures of 1975 (Fiaccadori, 2015). In his own words Foucault stated:

> This year I would like to begin studying something that I have called somewhat
>
> vaguely- bio-power. By this I mean a number of phenomena that seem to me to be
>
> quite significant, namely, the set of mechanisms through which the basic
>
> biological features of the human species become the object of a political strategy,
>
> of a general strategy of power

According to Foucauldian scholar Fiaccadori (2015), Foucault used this term to mean:

> [a] governments' ability to regulate and control subjects – or to be more precise
>
> "populations" – by optimizing the productivity of their lives in terms of
>
> improving their health, welfare and labor productivity through a number of
>
> technologies or mechanisms of power. Contrary to sovereign power, which is
>
> based on the sovereign's ability to kill, biopower is defined by Foucault as "the
>
> right to 'make' live and to 'let' die" (p. 151)

However, Foucault's distinction and use of the concept of biopower is not meant to be a

replacement for sovereign power, nor an attempt to move away from critiquing sovereign

power. My interpretation of Foucault is that biopower is not a separate concept, but rather

a tool of sovereign power. Biopower is not the opposite of sovereign power, nor it is even

a compliment to it; they may be considered "siblings," but they cannot be unlinked from

each other. In fact, Foucault linked biopower as "a core condition of western sovereignty

inherited from Roman law" (Morgensen, 2011, p. 60). In other words, this use of

biopower had already proven itself to serve the general strategy of sovereign power, and

colonization was not and exception to Western imperial rule (Morgensen, 2011). In the

United States specifically:

> the biopolitics of settler colonialism was constituted by the imposition of colonial
>
> heteropatriarchy and the hegemony of settler sexuality, which sought both the
>
> elimination of Indigenous sexuality and its incorporation into settler sexual
>
> modernity (Morgensen, 2011, p. 61)

The use of sovereign power in the form of cis/heteronormativity was deployed as

biopower against both Native populations and had already been but continued to be

deployed against settler populations, though vastly different in the implications. The

specific attributions or "basic biological features of the human species" that were deemed

preferable in the service of the sovereign power are the features that make up the picture

of cis/heteronormativity; including race (white), binary cisgenders with rigid roles and

expectations, heterosexual sex sanctioned to state sanctioned/legitimate relationships, of a

certain body type and age (of 'reproductive' and working/labor years) and non-disability

status. Cis/heteronormativity is deployed as biopower in the control of populations, and

the creation of 'good' citizens and citizenship; as well as the policing of 'citizenry' today.

Therefore, cis/heteronormativity cannot be understood outside of racialization, settler

colonialism and capitalism, and was central to the maintenance of the colony and not

simply a result of colonialism (Stoler, 1989). Fiaccadori (2015) elaborates on racism as

fundamental to sovereign power:

> Racism serves the state a twofold purpose: affirming its sovereignty, whilst
>
> disabling that of those it perceives as threats. By acting as the protector of the
>
> 'integrity, the superiority, and the purity of the race,' the state uses racism 'to
>
> protect its sovereignty via medical normalization' (p. 163)

The deployment of biopower will be further illustrated in the upcoming sections which

includes the medical normalization through settler colonialism, capitalism and anti-Black

"science."

Morgensen (2011) states that theorists who address biopower and colonialism are

indebted to the efforts of anthropologist Ann Stoler who located Foucauldian accounts of

modern sexuality within colonial studies. Stoler and other colonial studies scholars have

examined the racial and national formations of sexuality that produce biopolitics. She

argues that linking theories of biopolitics and colonialism shifts trajectories of queer

theory interpretation of Foucault's work as a history of Western desire, because neither

European nor Western cultural legacies can be understood without first studying their

formation in relation to settler/colonial societies (Stoler, 1989).

Critics that claim Foucault did not include colonialism may be misguided by their

own placement of colonialism as a past event, as opposed to an ongoing tactic and basic

tenant of western imperial rule that is embedded with his understanding. The work of

anthropologist Ann Stoler substantiates my interpretation of this issue (Stoler, 1989).

Stoler demonstrated how Foucault traced histories in Europe to explain both "imperial

metropoles," or mother cities in Europe and colonial societies produced modern

sexuality, race and biopower (Stoler, 1989, Morgensen, 2011).

The work of Stoler "displaced more common readings of Foucault's history of

sexuality in queer theory, which tended to frame European societies and their normative

whiteness as roots of modern sexuality, and to pay secondary or no attention to race or

colonialism" (Morgensen, 2011, p. 62). For example, the deployment of state racism is

foundational to Foucault's description of modern regimes that produce subjects and

define populations for regulation, defining cis/heteronormativity as inherently racist as it

is built upon notions of race and white supremacy.

To Foucault, biopower occurs in the entire domain of human life, from

institutional level to local levels, but works in capillary, preventive fashion, "dealing with

a multiplicity of aleatory and often unpredictable phenomena" (Fiaccadori, 2015).

Among these phenomena Fiaccadori (2015) mentions several examples that are relevant

to this research:

all phenomena related to "birth-control," "problems of morbidity," not so much

epidemics but "endemics" or illnesses that are routinely prevalent in a particular

population, "public hygiene," "problems of reproduction," the problems of "old

age," "accidents" and "the effects of the environment" (p. 157)

Therefore, biopower is not just about disciplining individuals through regulative

mechanisms as in disciplinary power, and not only about turning men into subjects of

labor, it is the overall mechanisms that act to achieve "regularity" or the status quo

(Fiaccadori, 2015). Ultimately these techniques achieve subjugation of bodies and control

of populations (Foucault, 1984). Racist discourse is at the heart of legitimizing state

violence.

In efforts of social justice and supporting the health and wellbeing of individual

clients, these concepts are crucial to our understanding, in order to dismantle them. In

terms of this research, the use of biopower can been seen in the discourse and analysis of

Chapter 5.

The Deployment of Power through Settler Sexuality and the Creation of Citizenry

This section builds upon the previous introduction of settler colonialism by

providing a historical account of the deployment of settler sexuality in the

creation/maintenance of sovereign power. In the 16th century, European nations began a

more extensive exploration overseas motivated by their own socioeconomic crisis. This

exploration included the widespread adoption of colonization as national European policy

to exploit resources for the maintenance of sovereign power. The overseas exploration

was directly tied to economic pursuits and the search of new trade routes, leading to the

rise of global trade, exploitation, enslavement, military conquest, and white supremacy

(Stoler, 1989). Fundamental to settler colonialism is the exploitation of land for profit

(Arvin et al., 2013). However, extracting profit from stolen land includes the creation

ownership and landowners, which was dependent upon the destruction and removal of

Indigenous people, as well as the destruction of their relationship to the land (Morgensen,

2011).

As introduced in Chapter 1, heteropatriarchy (heterosexuality and patriarchy are

perceived as normal and natural, all else as abhorrent) and heteropaternalism (the

nuclear-domestic arrangements in which the father is both center and leader serves as the

model for social and state arrangements) provide the cornerstones in the production of

citizenry that supports and bolsters the nation state (Arvin et al., 2013; K'E' Infoshop,

2019; Morgensen, 2011). The weaponization of gender and sexuality is foundational to

the survival/establishment of the colony (KE' Infoshop, 2019; Stoler, 1989). The

imposition of heteropatriarchy and heteropaternalism enacted the destruction of complex

structures of government and kinship present in Indigenous culture, and interrupted

Indigenous nations' "very sense of being a people." In historical accounts of early

Spanish settlement, queer and trans people were among the first to be brutalized and

murdered in the elevation of settler sexuality as the "expectation" (K'E' Infoshop, 2019).

Attributed to "unnatural ways of life," the massacre of queer and trans folks forced

everyone else to adhere to colonial understandings of gender and sexuality (K'E'

Infoshop, 2019). However, this deployment of cis/heteronormativity (through policing

and destruction of sexuality and gender diversity) as an oppressive tool of domination is

not limited to Native people.

White settler societies generally followed a strict Judeo-Christian gender binary

and hierarchy, wherein "men employed higher authority over women in every aspect of

society, especially within their 'normal' and 'respectable' heterosexual monogamous

relationships" (K'E' Infoshop, 2019, p.6-7). Western conceptions relate gender and

sexuality to the other and base such subjectivities upon 'the act' of physically engaging

with someone of a certain gender. For instance, "homosexuality" focuses on the "act" of

"same-sex" relations, with "same-sex" defined by colonial understandings of gender

(K'E' Infoshop, 2019, p.6). The religious and spiritual underpinnings of European sexual

ideologies and sexual regulation bolstered the superiority of whiteness, creating

narratives of "uncivilized" and "savage" to support the existence of European civility.

This had also occurred in relations to the Eastern world which created the distinction of

Western as European.

The enforcement of binary gender roles and heteropatriarchy was deeply

entangled with attempts to limit and manage claims or ownership to land. In addition to

the removal and destruction of Indigenous people, the exploitation of land relied on

systems of slavery and other labor exploitation to ensure productivity and revenue (Arvin

et al., 2013). However, the propensity towards limited binary thinking was not restricted

to concepts of gender and sexuality and is built into European ideology (Stoler, 1989;

Story, 2010). Biological and cultural distinctions were defined in gendered terms and

fears of "racial degeneracy" were grounded in "class specific sexual norms" (Stoler,

1989, p 63). The racialized origins and capitalistic motivations of these concepts remain

in practice today and are evidenced by the privileging of cis/heteronormativity across

systems of domination/oppression.

Understanding these historical links is vital in efforts to disrupt system of

oppressions and the various mechanisms of domination that remain in place today. The

following section reports on the history of sexuality and anti-Blackness as science as well as the way capitalism is served by the commodification of bodies.

Capitalism and Anti-Blackness as "Science"

The concept of blackness as a color has long been established in European sociopolitical ideology, and outlined within Christianity, symbolizing "inherent evilness, libidinousness and disgrace" (Story, 2010, p. 27). Prior to the social construction of race, blackness was positioned as the opposite of whiteness in European cultural hegemony (Benard, 2016; Story, 2010). The 16th century European perceptions of Black Africans were intensely loaded with these meanings, and the emerging construction of race and drive of capitalist goals expressed these ingrained European binary values, including dichotomies of white and black, good and evil, mind and body (Benard, 2016; Stoler, 1989; Story, 2010). In addition, European core values of heteropatriarchy and binary gender meant the study of female bodies was limited to the position that they "deviated" from the male, and females across the animal kingdom were viewed as primarily sexual beings (Story, 2010). The bodies of women and Africans were linked from the beginning of colonialism, as both were devalued and treated as subsets of humanity. The combination of fear and fascination of female sexuality was projected on Black women, resulting in centuries of exploitation and objectification that become hegemonic, a powerful and seemingly invisible part of daily live and dominant culture norms (Story, 2010). This creates what Black critical scholars have called the "invention of the Black female body," as well as the merger of anti-Black culture with science (Story, 2010).

European and American scientists "were 'scientifically' invested in the conviction of African inferiority" and created an ideology on this assumption which also met their

capitalist and social interests (Story, 2010, p. 37). In recounting the significance of this

history Story (2010) continues:

> It is at this point of departure that science and culture merged and began
>
> informing one another, so we become unclear as to where science begins, and
>
> culture ends. The European and American sociopolitical structure of society
>
> *rested* on the scientific positioning of Africans and women in order to rank them
>
> socially, and the social positioning of Africans and women in society gave many
>
> scientists their hypotheses about how the races of man were to be ranked. The
>
> effects of 'scientific' reasoning had a major impact on European and American
>
> visual culture. These differential scientific prescriptions of human rank and
>
> behavior were all translated visually through cultural, genealogical, and
>
> sociopolitical lenses to *reinscribe the black female body as the antithesis of the*
>
> *white female body* (p. 37 emphasis mine)

This quote highlights the interwoven relationship between culture, science, and its

translation to visual representations of bodies that is still apparent in media, beauty

magazines, and medical myths about health. The anti-Black investment of scientific

inquiry is at the very basis of cultural ideology surrounding gender and sexuality. The

positioning of the Black woman or femme body as the antithesis of the white woman or

femme body is further explored in upcoming sections of "womanhood racialized," and

"white women and cult of true womanhood" under regulatory practices. This is relevant

to this research in the interrogation and disruption of whiteness, particularly for the role

of white women in bolstering systems of oppression throughout history and today.

The anti-Black origins of the medical system have been well documented through the experimentation and exploitation of Black bodies, the development of medical procedures and the search for 'knowledge.' None of which can be separated from foundations of the field of psychology without specific attention and intention. This specific attention is in part, the purpose of this research. This is relevant to the findings in Chapters 4 and 5, where it is particularly apparent within dominant culture of white, cisgender, heterosexual, non-disabled discourse and the way in which these origins manifest and provide invisible but rigid boundaries for what is acceptable and legitimate at the local level of discourse in experiences of sexuality and relationships. This is further explored through interrogation of regulatory practices and the utilization of "normal" and "natural" in discourse of sexuality and gender.

Regulatory Practices at the Social Level

Social Construction and Deployment of "Natural"

The socially constructed nature of sexuality and gender has been demonstrated in research for decades, illustrating that much of what we think of as "natural" actually functions as a tool for social control (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Foucault, 1978; Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Laws & Schwartz, 1977; Rubin, 1993). The institutional practices that surround sexuality such as access to marriage and legal protections, medical care, and laws governing behaviors, are socially constructed and products of human activity (Rubin, 1993). These practices are intertwined with conflicts of interest and political maneuvering, which has been both deliberate and incidental. In this way, "sex is always political" (Rubin, 1993, p. 4). Scholars such as Rubin (1993) have outlined the strong connections between sociopolitical movements, economic climate and what is considered culturally acceptable regarding the expression and experience of

gender and sexuality. Disputes around sexuality are often a means of "displacing social anxieties and discharging their attendant emotional intensity" which therefore demands social attention and care to these issues in times of extreme social stress (Rubin, 1993, p. 4). This distribution of power not only results in structural violence that disproportionately impacts historically marginalized communities and individuals, but also functions to maintain the power of those who conform or fit into its rigid boundaries.

In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault identifies that the regulatory deployment of sexuality through four major focus points – children, women, married heterosexual couples and the sexually "perverse" – has allowed power to spread into families and throughout European society (Foucault, 1978). In other words, the control extended from being structural (i.e. from the church or the governing class) to being interpersonal and personal in the family through self-policing and close monitoring of one's equals. This was initially tied to the white upper class, where sexual deviance was believed to be hereditary, and thus controls were placed on sex, primarily intended to ensure the health and survival of the white upper-class family's position in society. Foucault outlines the ways in which several societal institutions, including the church, psychiatry, and "good government," have made us think that our sexual behaviors and orientation, specifically a "moral" sexuality, is a part of one's essence, and hereditary, making the very basis of who they are, when in reality it is just a social construct that makes a society easier to control. Ultimately, there is nothing "natural" modern ideas of sexuality and gender and knowledge of sexuality has been employed as a tool to distribute and maintain power.

These four focus points are full of complexity and nuance, and the limitations of space and time prevent the scope of this research from containing a more in-depth

exploration of each area, and therefore are presented here as an introduction and orientation to the issues. A thorough introduction to the focus point of "children" is outside the scope of this research. Foucault's focus on the deployment of control through children ranges beyond the realm of who is permitted to have children to emphasize the cultural narrative of "protecting our children" as the basis for social control. Often the actions to "protect" have not benefited children or their protection. This is further noted in the patriarchal masculinities section. The remaining three focus points are explored throughout upcoming sections. "Married (monogamous) heterosexual couples" is explored through the heterosexual script and patriarchal sex codes, "Women" is explored through the racialization of women's bodies, and "The sexually perverse" is explored in the history of psychology and use of the DSM in the pathologizing of sexual behaviors.

Womanhood Racialized

In *Making the empire respectable*, Stoler (1989) demonstrates that principles of "who could bed and who could wed" were fundamental to colonialism and therefore inextricably tied to capitalism. In the United states specifically, "the passionless 'lady' arose in symbiosis with the primitively sexual slave" (Collins, 2000). The juxtaposition of marriageable [white] women versus sexualized [Black] women is oppressive to both white women and Black women, but it demonstrates that white women have a "vested interest in the colonization of Black bodies" (Benard, 2016, p. 3). While white women of a certain class are able to challenge binaries to an extent, Black women "are defined *by* their sexuality and *as* their sexuality" (Benard, 2010, p. 3). This dichotomy is foundational to constructing definitions of sexuality. White women are seen as oppressed in the domain of gender and perhaps class but have benefited from an ambitious and racialized position and "always as agents of the imperial system" (Stoler, 1989). A

position that collectively white woman have not yet come to terms with. Racialized

womanhood, and racism in general, is not limited to anti-Blackness, however, given the

wheel of domination and the "erasure" of Indigenous women, and the juxtaposition of

Black women and white women are foundational to the culture in the United States. The

anti-Black racialization of womanhood is further illustrated through the racialized

concept of "true womanhood."

White Women and the Cult of "True Womanhood"

"True womanhood" is an inherently racist concept that was part of the prevailing

value system of white upper and middle classes in the 19th century of the United States

and United Kingdom (Welter, 1966). With the increased need for white men to perform

labor on colonized land and building their personal wealth, there was the risk of feeling

guilt over the negligence of religious values and practices in favor of such wealth

(Welter, 1966). However, as Welter states "He could salve his conscience by reflecting

that he had left behind a hostage, not only to fortune, but to all the values which he held

so dear and treated so lightly" in the true woman (p.151). This absolved the man of the

moral obligation to his religious practice and prevented him from making a choice

between religion and capitalism. This was strategic for the system to evolve. Historically

religion had been a strong tool for social order and control and the maintenance of social

hierarchies, and of course there would be resistance to evolving times when labor was

needed to grow the economy. Everyone has a role – men are to work, and women are to

stay home and uphold the sanctuaries of god.

Welter (1966) provides a thorough overview of the concept. The virtues of piety,

purity, submission, and domesticity were central to the worth and character of the (white)

woman. These were the attributes upon which white women judged themselves and were

judged by a husband, a community and society. The concept of "true womanhood" was

the premise for all writing and authors who addressed women in the 19th century (Welter,

1966). With these virtues she was promised "happiness and power" but without them, no

matter was else she achieved, she was nothing. With piety at her core, religion was the

source of her strength. Purity was to be preserved and death was preferred to its loss.

Purity was considered a moral imperative, but it set up a dilemma that only submission

could resolve (Welter, 1966). Marriage was the only source of her happiness and women

were to remain "pure" until their wedding night, however, marriage was also the "end of

her innocence" which often created confusion and questioning that could upend the social

order. Such questioning was met with encouragement of submission. Thus, submission

was the most expected feminine virtue and the answer to any dilemma- she was not to

question, just to accept.

Ultimately, white women were in collusion with dominant patriarchal hierarchies

as she was bestowed the gift of a husband who brought economic power, and she was

there to maintain moral and social power. She was vital to the maintenance of the social

order and was told such. However, to dismiss this as simple sexism and irrelevant in a

more feminist world would dismiss the role of white women in perpetuating anti-Black

racism throughout history and today.

White womanhood was reinforced by the 19th century guidebooks, education and

social practices, but this image was strengthened by having a defined opposite in the

black female sexuality that was constructed at the time (Carby, 1987). Black feminist

scholar Patricia Hill Collins (2000) states "a devalued Jezebel makes pure white

womanhood possible" (p. 142). The division of women into two categories of

asexual/moral and sexual/immoral creates the template for constructing ideas of

femininity and masculinity (Collins, 2000). Women's sexuality is constructed through a

"tightly interwoven series of binaries" which collectively create "a sexual hierarchy with

approved sexual expression installed at the top and forbidden sexualities regulated to the

bottom" (p.144).

Carby (1987) further explores "true womanhood" through the institutionalization

of the rape of enslaved women and the social transference of this sexual aggression onto

a "lustful" enslaved woman. In fact, this idea of the lustful Black woman was part of the

argument for the abolition of slavery. The common argument was that ongoing and

common practice of rape at the hands of white slave owners meant that Black women had

"no protection for their chastity" (p. 35). The narrative was that Black men who were

enslaved were not able to 'protect' enslaved women from rape and the subsequent births

of children that were the result, causing powerful and 'distinguished' white men to have

no choice but to sell these children as they would "pigs or sheep" (p.35). It is because

enslaved Black men were 'not able' to protect Black women in the convention dictated

the by the inviolability of the body of the white woman that abolitionists felt slavery

should be ended (Carby, 1987). This is but one example of the ways in which for many of

us, history has not been taught to us.

Carby (1987) also explores the romance novels of the time through the narrative

of the Black women character and evidence that "she has failed the test of true

womanhood because she survived institutional rape, whereas the true heroine would

rather die than be sexually abused" (p 34). This type of mental gymnastics to thwart

responsibility for rape and sexual assault continues to ring true today.

In summary, the purity, piety and submission of the white woman, her very worth and existence, is intimately tied to and dependent upon the oppression of Black woman. And the exploitation and controlling of Black bodies and female sexuality is intimately tied to capitalism. Without purity she was "no woman at all," a member of "some lower order," a "fallen angel." Welter (1966) outlines the many examples in which "To contemplate the loss of purity brought tears; to be guilty of such a crime, in the women's magazines at least, brought madness or death" (p. 154). These connections are further operationalized through the commodification of bodies and the "promises" of capitalism as the answer to obtaining "worth."

Capitalism and the Commodification of Bodies

The controlling of Black women and femme bodies has been particularly important for capitalist affairs in the United States (Collins, 2000). Two features of capitalism in the Black woman's experience that are noted by Patricia Hills Collins are the commodification and exploitation of Black women under capitalism.

Commodification and objectification are closely linked allowing for bodies to literally be bought and sold on the open market, and then status markers in class hierarchies related to gender and race. As an example, Collins (2000) points to the "hot market" for white babies and adoptions, opposed to Black babies who remain in foster care. Capitalism has relied on exploiting Black women's bodies for centuries and continues today. As Collins (2000) writes:

> Via mechanisms such as employment discrimination, maintaining images of
> Black women that construct them as mules or objects of pleasure, and
> encouraging or discouraging Black women's reproduction via state intervention,
> Black woman's labor, sexuality, and fertility all have been exploited (p. 143)

Black feminist scholars have written for decades about the ways in which sexuality and

unquestioned heterosexism can be manipulated within systems of class, race, gender and

nation (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1994; 2004; to name a few). The dynamics of oppression

and the colonial structures of race/class/gender/sexual relations remain consistent today.

In alignment with Native feminist scholars caution that colonialism is not in the past,

Black feminist scholars highlight that although the relations of domination may change,

the systems of domination do not. Benard (2011) states that the fundamental structure of

power relations and the hegemonic colonial discourses of race/class/gender/sexuality are

reflected in current day capitalism:

> Patriarchal capitalism and colonialism differ very little in structure ideology and
>
> method of conquer and oppression. Both are systems of white patriarchy. Both
>
> systems are violent and exploitive. Both rely on 'ownership' of brown and Black
>
> bodies. Both are ultimately about profit-making. And both are systems of
>
> structural violence that routinely violate human rights" (p. 2)

One primary difference that has evolved in capitalist coercion is the illusion of choice.

The controlling processes under colonialism were "clearly stated and articulated,

structured and physically violent" whereas under capitalism in a democratic society,

social control is less tolerated and the illusion of choice becomes particularly important in

controlling processes (Nader, 1997). However, whereas in colonialism the message is

made explicit, patriarchal capitalism has moved the controlling system to the background

for most who are unaware of its mechanisms.

The Patriarchal Sex Code

Patriarchy is social system that privileges and prioritizes a very specific definition

of maleness and masculinity, has "a laser focus on control" and is centered around

oppression of women (Garrett-Walker et al., 2019, p. 71). In building upon the

Indigenous scholars and addressing heteropatriarchy and heteroparternalism, this section

begins with an outline of the ongoing prevailing patriarchal sex code in the United States.

Ellison (2001) provides a summary and critique:

> All societies make arrangements to organize family life and regulate erotic power,
>
> and our society is no different in this regard. Far from what comes naturally,
>
> sexuality is a learned response profoundly shaped by cultural influences. In a
>
> patriarchal culture that over-values things associated with [white, nondisabled]
>
> men's lives and devalues women, the sex that is culturally constructed is
>
> patriarchal sex. Normative sexuality reinforces [white] male power and control.
>
> Therefore, it is only partially accurate to say that this culture is preoccupied with
>
> gender. More to the point, the prevailing interest is to maintain gender hierarchy
>
> and male gender supremacy in intimate and other social relations (p. 8)

The addition of white and nondisabled as specifier is mine, as the patriarchal sex code has

different impact and nuance based on race and disability status. The three assumptions

that operate in this prevailing, patriarchal sex code are (1) sex is viewed as an alien force

requiring control, (2) heterosexual marriage is the only appropriate context for containing

the dangerous energy and to channel it into life serving directions, and (3) women are

trouble and the sources and symbols of illicit desire (Plaskow, 1991). These assumptions

are reinforced through lessons in abstinence only sex education. Therefore, women are

the main problem and pose great danger to men and their health, sanity and wellbeing

(Ellison, 2001). The patriarchal sex/gender "ethic" is about ownership and control; men

are entitled to control women's sexuality and body, connected to the ethics of men's

property rights and economics, as in when a father passes on his daughter to a husband

who holds the power until his death and it then passed to the adult son (Ellison, 2001).

Historically, this control tends to increase in times of economic and political cultural

distress (Rubin, 1993). For example, in 2019, during a deeply divided cultural and

political climate, this is illustrated with the resurgence of brutal attacks on reproductive

rights and attempts for control over the bodies of cisgender women, trans men and trans

women.

The patriarchal sex code is about ownership and control. On the relational level

power as control is romanticized, encouraging people to believe that erotic desire is about

conquest and surrender (Ellison, 2001). "Therefore, it is not surprising that many people

confuse intimacy and abuse or that they tolerate control as evidence of 'true love'"

(Ellison, 2001, p. 8). Additionally, there is no room within this sex code for exploring and

embodying pleasure, or for a mutually respectful and beneficial connection or

communication. "People learn to accept injustice in their bodies, as well as their psyches"

(Ellison, 2001, p. 8). Indeed, this is goal of the illusion of choice. However, an analysis of

patriarchy from a binary gendered analysis without an intersectional understanding is

insufficient. Historical and present movements, including feminism and queer studies,

have challenged patriarchy for its oppression of women but "have yet to highlight the

ways in which patriarchy is inherently racist" (Garrett-Walker et al., 2019, p. 71).

Patriarchal Masculinities are Rooted in Racism

Patriarchy has placed a very rigid and limited view on who can participate in

masculinity and what behaviors are deemed masculine (Garrett-Walker et al., 2019).

Patriarchal masculinity can only be enacted through specific behaviors including anti-

feminine, economic stability, heteronormativity, domination, control, and violence

(hooks, 2004, Garrett-Walker et al., 2019). The construction of this ideal manhood and masculinity is upheld by social norms about how both men and women "should act" and serve as a tool to control social behavior and uphold the superiority of whiteness (Garrett-Walker et al., 2019). However, just as Black women were not permitted to "seek the tenets" of womanhood and femininity, Black men were never allowed to exhibit masculinity because of racial subjugation (Garrett-Walker et al., 2019). The ways in which patriarchy has been used against Black communities has reified whiteness as the norm and superior to Blackness (hooks, 2004, Garrett-Walker et al., 2019). Garrett-Walker et al. (2019) provide a through account of the ways in which in which masculinity has been weaponized against Black people, as well as an account of the ways in which this violence required enslaved Black people to be flexible in their expressions of masculinity and femininity. For example, enslaved Black men were forced to strategically engage in behaviors that were deemed feminine such as being "unaggressive, dependent, passive, submissive," and Black women had to expressive "masculine" traits such as "exhibiting strength and being emotionally inexpressive" (Garrett-Walker et al., 2019, p. 71, 72).

Hegemonic patriarchy creates expectations that a "good worker is controlled, reasoned and hardworking" and thus Black women were often beat into "hiding emotions which tending to their children, partners, and field and domestic tasks" (Garrett-Walker et al., 2019, p. 78). This example is where the "superwoman" stereotypes of Black women emerged. This also references the interconnections of capitalism, the image of the ideal worker/citizen, with patriarchy and the fallacy of binary genders. The stereotypes that patriarchal masculinity has put forth about Black men also continue to exist today with

deadly consequences. These stereotypes include characterizing Black men and boys as "violent, dangerous criminals, hypersexual" and are used to influence unjust decisions made within social institutions such as education, healthcare and the "in/justice system" (Garrett-Walker et al., 2019, p. 76). These stereotypes are firmly hegemonic and contribute to seeing Black boys both dangerous and as much older than they are. One only needs to turn on the news to see the implications of this enacted through the police murders of young Black boys who are seen as a threat whether they are armed or merely holding a children's toy, while white men/young adults are carefully arrested and taken into custody as their victims lay bleeding around them and an actual gun remains in their hand.

In summary, this section provides an overview and introduction to the historical and current day weaponization of cis/heteronormativity in the cultural and structural foundations of our country and understanding of sexuality and gender. The violence and harm experienced from the deployment or cis/heteronormativity has vastly different implications depending on the social location or privileged position of the individuals involved. Understanding patriarchy without an intersectional approach is insufficient. The racialized concepts of gender are often invisible in the regulatory practices that capitalism and patriarchy dictate in the dominant cultural understandings of sexuality and gender. This section presents an overview of the regulatory practices at a social level. The following section discusses sexual behaviors and the review of literature which examines it.

Sexual Behaviors

Experiences of sexuality extend far beyond the specificity of sex behaviors, however, cis/heteronormative narratives, and dominant cultural discourses seem particularly focused on "who is doing what" and the specificity of sexual behaviors. However, despite regulatory practices and systems of domination that are deployed though dominant cultural narratives and normativity, research on sexual behaviors has shown that there is huge variance in the actual behaviors that people engage in regardless of identity or orientation.

In their research on sexual behavior that was considered groundbreaking, Kinsey et al. (1948) suggested that "such a continuous and widely spread series (of sexual behaviors) raises a question as to whether the terms 'normal' and 'abnormal' belong in a scientific vocabulary" (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948, p. 199). Yet 80 years later, the psychological world remains focused on defining normal behaviors and deeming any others as pathological. One mechanism of this is through the classification and use of diagnoses like paraphilias and fetishes (Donaghue, 2015; Moser & Kleinplatz, 2005; Nichols & Shernoff, 2006). In more recent research conducted by the Kinsey Institute with a randomly sampled N= 486 between the ages of 18 and 96, participants were asked what activities represented having "had sex" (Sanders et al., 2010). The researchers found that there was no consensus on what behaviors need to be present to entail having "had sex." Though when pressed to consider what "sex" is or is not, the general public and the mental health professions are not shy about deciding who is pathological.

What it means to "have sex" and what behaviors are "normal" or acceptable, continue to be a culturally imposed judgment that is completely subjective and not based

in research. Even Freud said that compulsory heterosexuality was a problem (McRuer, 2006). Power differences dependent upon race, gender, disability and class, are major factors in how "normal" sexual relationships are expected to be carried out (Ewing & Schacht, 2000). For example, non-heterosexual identities were presumed to be a result of a gender issue – as in, "you aren't really gay, you just have gender confusion" (Diamond & Butterworth, 2008). Conversely, researchers posited that trans women were exclusively attracted to men (i.e. De Cuypere et al., 2005). This assumption was so deeply embedded into the practices of trans health that until very recently, medical professionals required trans men and women to prove their heterosexual attraction as a prerequisite to medical intervention and as evidence of their gender identity. Thus, access to healthcare relied on adherence to the "heterosexual script."

The following sections provide an overview of literature on the heterosexual script and the nuance between "sex" as in behaviors, and "sexuality" as the focus of research.

The Heterosexual Script

Literature on heteronormativity defines it as a construct that captures macro level societal dynamics that operate as a regulatory practice that privileges heterosexuality as natural and normal and everything else as deviant (Chambers, 2007; L. C. Smith & Shin, 2015). To illustrate the operationalization of cis/heteronormativity and examples of its regulatory practices, this content section details a research study from 2007 which combines dimensions of compulsory heterosexuality with script theory to develop and analysis a heterosexual script of sexuality in primetime television shows (Kim et al., 2007).

Research evaluating the sexual content on television and the relationship to adolescent sexual behavior has occurred for decades, however, as Kim et al. (2007) note, previous studies have indicated the "*amount* of sexual content consumed is a stronger predictor of adolescent sexual behavior [rather] than the *type* of sexual consent consumed" (p.155 emphasis mine). Additionally, they note that previous research has not been conducted or understood through gendered sexuality and compulsory heterosexuality – which is more nuanced and meaningful than exposure to body parts or a sexual behavior (Kim et al., 2007).

In a 2007 research analysis of primetime television, Kim, et al. (2007) develop a heterosexual script that extends beyond previous research on a sequence of behaviors and extends to include the relational and sexual thoughts, feelings, beliefs and behaviors are scripted at the cultural level. This is the shift from sex to sexuality. Kim et al. (2007) depart from research that argues there are two separate scripts for cisgender girls/women and boys/men and posit there is one integrated script with parts that work in tandem to produce normativity, or what Judith Butler calls "culturally intelligible" interactions and relationships (Kim, 2007; Butler, 1993). The script is comprised of one part for "how girls think, feel and behave," and one part for boys/men (Kim, 2007, p.146). In summary, situated in positions of power, men actively pursue sexual relationships, treat women as objects, experience sexual feelings as uncontrollable, being demanding in sexual situations, rejecting homosexual feelings or behavior, appropriating female sexual desire, and avoiding commitment and emotional attachment with women (Kim et al., 2007). Women, therefore, are situated in positions of subordination. Women enact the script by "acting sexually passive, setting sexual limits, using their bodies and looks to attract men,

seeking stability and emotional involvement from male partners, appearing sexually

chaste, and not having or prioritizing their sexual desire" (Kim et al., 2007). The

interactions and interdependence of these scripts can be seen through the complimentary

codes the researchers developed.

Complementary Codes of the Heterosexual Script

The researchers coding included sets of complementary codes that reflected four

elements of the heterosexual script: the sexual double standard, courtship strategies,

attitudes towards commitment and homophobia (Kim et al., 2007). The sexual double

standard was coded as 'sex as masculinity' which includes sexual initiation and

preoccupation, positioning sexuality as a defining component of masculinity, and the

complementary 'good girls' where women are sexual gatekeepers, only engaging in sex

to fulfill the needs of the male partner or to "keep the relationship" (Kim et al., 2007, p.

148). The second code set reflects 'masculine courting strategies' or 'feminine courting

strategies' which encompass the notions of men as protectors, asserting power through

physical strength and buying gifts, and "making the first move" while women attract men

in more passive or indirect ways such as dressing provocatively, pretending to be in need

of assistance, and using playful/ suggestive innuendos. Central to this code set is the

notion that "women objectify themselves and exploit their bodies to attain power" in

relationships (Kim et al., 2007, p. 148). Attitudes towards commitment is similarly coded

as masculine or feminine, in which men actively avoid commitment or monogamy and

prioritize sex and other activities or people above romantic relationships. This also

reflects the position that men do not take part in relationship maintenance or conflict

resolution, and the mocking of monogamous men for losing their "freedom, power and

masculinity," while women prioritize monogamy and marriage, making sacrifices of

careers and time with friends in favor a "husband to feel like their lives are complete" (Kim et al., 2007, p. 148). The final complementary codes reflect male-oriented homophobia and appropriation of female homosexuality.

In the 51 hours of primetime television programing that was recorded for their research, Kim et al. (2007) found the heterosexual script was enacted 662 times. There was considerable variability across individual programs ranging from 3 per hour in a medical drama, to over 30 on sitcoms. On average, there were 15.53 references to the heterosexual script per hour. By far, the most frequent were the depictions of Sex as Masculinity, which comprised of 45.15% of the analysis.

The pervasive message was unilateral and clear; the accumulation of sexual experience with women is an important and necessary component of masculinity, and "boys/men should attain sexual experience by any means possible" (p. 154). The authors note that several male characters across the programing used "forceful or deceitful strategies to persuade girls/women to engage in sexual activity or to catch a glimpse of them unclothed" and that these "uninvited sexual overtures were often met with success" and the problematic nature went unaddressed (p. 154). In alignment with the framework of compulsory heterosexuality, the positive response from girls/women would be expected, as attracting male attention is the primary way in which girls/women "attain and assert (a form of) power" (p. 154). In totality, the results of this research present the pervasive exposure to and depiction of "mutually impoverished constructs" of cisgender/ed sexuality which ultimately "preclude boys' ability to say no to sex and girls' ability to say yes" (p. 154).

Self-policing. This research also captured concrete portrayals in which characters were either rewarded for complying with the heterosexual script or punished for deviation. For example, boys/men who act feminine are at risk for being harassed and labeled as "homosexual" and girls/women who express sexual desire risk being labeled a slut (Kim et al., 2007 p. 154). Characters police adherence to the heterosexual script interpersonally, but perhaps more importantly, the policing is portrayed as internalized. Self-policing of the heterosexual script results in shame, doubt, embarrassment or regret at any deviation. The authors state this study is the first step in attempts to develop a new way to evaluate the relationship between adolescent's television consumption and sexuality development. The message communicated is that boys/men and girls/women must regulate their sexuality with a state of constant vigilance. The main lesson is that boys must constantly work to "construct and assert their masculinity" and girls must walk the line between "making themselves sexually available to men and being appropriately demure" (p. 154).

This research study provides rich data for understanding compulsory heterosexuality as portrayed in media and entertainment. And exposes pieces of cis/heteronormativity that can be utilized for coding in research and analysis. The authors outline the implications for parents and policy makers who are concerned with censoring exposure to sex. The heterosexual script reflects the unhealthy normativity that is communicated and indoctrinates adolescents to unhealthy norms and adherence to such norms. They note federal warning for overt sexual content (i.e. body parts or an explicit sexual encounter or behavior) but no such warning exists for the gendered heterosexual script. This is not surprising in that the script reflects norms that are not seen as

problematic and are even encouraged. The authors recommend parental literacy on the

heterosexual script, restricting viewing for adolescents and strategies for talking about

what is being viewed in this domain. While I agree with increasing strategies for talking

about sexuality, I find the position of censoring to be misguided as it fails to take into

account that the pervasiveness of heteronormative script is regulatory, and its presence

already implies "censorship" outside its rigid definition. Rather than censorship I would

say more exposure to sex education and the dismantling of oppressive normativity that

interrogates underlying assumptions of why censorship would even be necessary. For

example, the authors proclaim that "the media industry won't change" because of

capitalism, and they suggest the increase in diverse images is the most we can ask for

(Kim et al., 2007, p. 156). There is an absence of critique on capitalism, the critical

analysis of who of what is already censored, and perhaps a different view of what or

where the harm comes from in relation to sexuality and adolescents.

In alignment with this research, Kim et al. (2007) illustrates the distinction and

nuance between sex and sexuality in analysis provides a more comprehensive capture of

norms and dominant cultural discourse. Additionally, their work provides a blueprint for

coding of specific elements of heterosexual scripts which ultimately reflect cis/hetero

norms.

In summary, the authors recommend research that considers the wide range of

sexual outcomes than is typical in the literature which focuses on the presence or absence

of sexual behavior as the outcome, and instead expands to include "ability to make

authentic and gratifying relational and sexual decisions" (Kim et al., 2007). Their

analysis does not extend to the source of production of their own question; the presence

or absence of a sexual act as a measure is embedded into cultural normativity, and the

ability to make authentic choices is inherently omitted from the scripts that are being

researched. This is further explored and illustrated as it relates to cisgender, heterosexual,

white men and impact of cis/heteronormativity on their self-perceptions.

Implications of Heteronormativity on White Cis Male Self-perception

Clarke, Marks, & Lykins (2015) outline and review a number of studies over

several decades investigating how exposure to, and depictions of heteronormative

behavior can influence cis male self-perceptions and attitudes relative to sexual behavior.

The range of work the researchers analyzed dates from Masters and Johnson in 1970, to

more recent research from 2015.

There is strong evidence for a close link between the suggestion of, or

engagement in, sexual behavior and "gender-typical self-perceptions" (Clarke, Marks, &

Lykins, 2015, p. 327). In other words, engaging in "gender typical" behavior provides

comfort of "gender-typical" self-perceptions. The results from several studies show that

after exposure to cues increasing the "salience of sexually related concepts" participants

were significantly faster than controls to categorize themselves as being either male or

female (Clarke, et al., 2015, p. 327). In other words, we can often gender ourselves in

relation to the sexual behavior we engage in; conversely, we engage in sexual behaviors

for the benefit of gendering ourselves. For example, when a cisgender man is fantasizing

about engaging in a sexual encounter, he is one of the actors in the scene and his

experience of his gender and sexual anatomy is carried with him as he considers his own

sexual energy and attractiveness in the scene. This is an incredibly important point, and a

tendency that people who are cisgender often take for granted or overlook. Historically,

research has pathologized people who are transgender, specifically transgender women,

for the exact same internal process of including themselves in their fantasies (Pfeffer, 2014).

Clarke et al. (2015) go on to discuss participants in these studies who were exposed to sexuality-related cues also showed significantly greater levels of identification with their own gender (Study 2), increased gender self-stereotyping (Study 3), and increased displays of gender-normative behavior (Studies 4 and 5). These findings indicate the presence of a close relationship between individuals' "perceptions of sexual behaviors and their perceptions of themselves as either normatively male or normatively female" (Clarke et al., 2015, p 327). The "sexual cues" that they refer to were depictions of a normative male and normative female engaged in kissing, in other words, a heteronormative cue.

While it may not be causative, the presence of rigid and compulsory heteronormative sexual beliefs coupled with trying to adhere to male myths has been found to contribute to maintaining a sexual dysfunction such as erectile dysfunction (Clarke et al., 2015). This research and others have led to understanding that cognitive schemas can inhibit the process of erotic stimulation by shifting attention from the actual physical erotic cues in the moment, to the emotional concerns of "inadequate" sexual performance. Therefore, beliefs about normative sexual functioning play a primary role in sexual difficulties because these beliefs "activate schemas that can both exacerbate and maintain instances of dysfunction" (Clarke et al., 2015, p. 328).

The power of socially sanctioned constructions, including heteronormative beliefs and assumptions, are not necessarily based in the personal knowledge, experience or identity of the person who subscribes to them, but instead are derived from the social

environment, and prototypes that are culturally and socially prescribed (Clarke et al.,

2015). In quantitative inquiries into exposure to more "modern" or egalitarian gender

roles, participants report significantly less personal gender typical attributes in

themselves, suggesting that "inferences about one's identity that are generated by sexual

situations may be particularly influenced by depictions of gender-normative behavior in

one's environment" (Clarke et al., 2015). Of course, these participants are not immune to

exposure to heteronormative expectations in our society; however, it is hopeful to

consider that exposure to opposing or alternative options can reduce the negative impact

of heteronormativity.

The narrow definition of "normal" that surrounds sexuality and gender suppresses

the possibility for an authentic expression and experience, even for the heteronormative

(Donaghue, 2015). Unfortunately, the fields of mental health have played a substantial

role in creating and perpetuating rigid definitions of "normal" and pathologizing

experiences and knowledge that exists outside dominant cultural norms or privileged

positions. The following sections will outline the history of psychology and sexuality,

subjugated knowledge in mental health and the role of the DSM in pathologizing sexual

behaviors.

The History of Psychology, Mental Health and Sexuality

The mental health professions, particularly psychiatry, have had a shameful

history of collusion with political powers and institutions to marginalize groups of the

population, especially women and sexual minorities (Nichols, 2006). Most psychological

theories are biased towards the preservation of prevalent social norms (Moser &

Kleinplatz, 2005; Nichols, 2006). A great deal of research that has been passed off as

neutral, is not neutral at all, and in fact favors privileged groups at the cost of the other (Carspecken, 1996).

About 250 years ago, Western medicine and especially psychiatry were responsible for transforming masturbation from sin to pathology (Moser & Kleinplatz, 2005). The shift from religion to science as noted above, was deeply infused with racism and white supremacy. Rationales provided by early psychiatrists led to violent measures to prevent children from touching their genitals (which included genital mutilation in the form of clitorectomies) (Moser & Kleinplatz, 2005; Rubin, 1993). The persecution of gay, lesbian and bisexual people was condoned and justified for decades by the listing of homosexuality in the DSM (Moser & Kleinplatz, 2005). In addition,

> Other psychiatric follies concerning sexuality from the past include involutional
> melancholia, promiscuity, oral sex, nymphomania, frigidity, to name just a few.
> Relying on the clinicians' *own behavior and experiences to guide assessment* –
> rather than upon objective criteria – has led to a conspicuous pattern of diagnoses:
> 'too much masturbation' has been deemed excessive; 'too many partners'
> demonstrates 'promiscuity'; 'too frequent sex' has been diagnosed as
> nymphomania or satyriasis; 'too little response' is judged as an arousal disorder;
> 'too little desire' is labelled inhibition; 'too few orgasms' were considered
> frigidity and 'too different' sex is called perverted or paraphilic. (Moser &
> Kleinplatz, 2005, p.261-2; emphasis current author)

Whose knowledge led to these decisions? Foucault's (1978) connection of sexuality, power and knowledge led him to study the ways in which psychiatry subjugated knowledges and disqualifying any contradictory information or experience as "beneath

the required level of cognition or scientity" (p. 82). He was not only concerned with the

way in which institutional and political regimes produced privileged knowledge, but the

ways in which structural power expanded out to be practiced on the individual and

interpersonal levels through self-policing (Foucault, 1978; Hartman, 1992). In Victorian

times, as the discourse and control of sexuality intensified, it created an important area of

study: psychiatry, or the profession of Alienists. The intensification of the cultural

discourse moved the emphasis from the acceptable acts limited in marriage, placing the

focus instead on "sexual perversion." An individual's sexuality was said to explain a

great deal of their character (Foucault, 1978). As a result, psychiatry and prostitution

were the two outlets at different ends of the spectrum wherein people could confess and

release their "improper" sexual feelings in safety (Foucault, 1978). For the field of

psychiatry, access to these "confessions" seemed to only confirm and perpetuate

pathologizing in the field of psychiatry. For those in the alternate field of prostitution, the

contradictory information, experience and wisdom they could provide was placed

"beneath the required level of cognition or scientity" where it remains today (Foucault,

1978, p. 82).

Subjugated Knowledge in Mental Health Settings

By quoting the poet Imamu Amiri Baraka as saying, "I can't say who I am unless

you agree I am real," Hartman (1992) illustrates the relationship between knowledge,

oppression, power and truth, particularly in mental health professions. Historically, only

the "truth" of the dominant norm is valued, effectively erasing the experience and impact

on oppressed groups. For clinicians, it is imperative to understand the power-knowledge

relationship and the extent to which they may unwittingly and well-meaningly

disempower clients through the role of "expert" and the use of "knowledge." Hartman

(1992) summarizes Foucault's theory of subjugated knowledges "which have been exiled

from the legitimate domains of formal knowledge," and the way in which privileged

knowledge is circulated through discourse in everyday interactions (p. 19). She explains

this through illustrations of the DSM and the impact of these classifications on the

thinking of mental health workers and the relationship with the client's self-concept. She

also illustrates Foucault's analysis through the widely known story of how we have come

to understand incest. Freud initially thought that the cause of emotional disturbance in

adult women was their being sexually abused as children, but then came to believe that

such memories reported by women were not of real events but were childhood fantasies,

evidence of infantile sexual wishes. This shift in conceptualization served powerful

interests at the time (Hartman, 1992). This example is particularly poignant in that the

"scientific knowledge" of incest-as-childhood-fantasy was not only maintained for over

100 years but was done so successfully that "the knowledge of incest victims was

subjugated to the extent that victims themselves denied their own experience" (p. 20).

        We have seen time and time again that what Foucault called "the insurrection of

subjugated knowledge" does not occur through the challenging of theories alone, but

through sociopolitical movements. As agents of social change, Hartman calls on mental

health professionals to avoid participating in oppression by abandoning the role of expert,

to collaborate and listen to the powerful voices of our clients who are the experts of their

experiences. She states that we must not privilege professional knowledge, and we must

allow ourselves to hear the information from clients that would challenge our views. "We

must attend. We have been mistaken before and we will be mistaken again. But we are

only wrong when we continue to cling to our mistaken truths" (p. 23). One such

"mistaken truth" is that of cis/heteronormativity. At the very least, we can let go of the

notion that mental health professionals have "expertise" in the overall wellbeing of any

individual, considering most clinicians' lack of training in human sexuality and

dismantling cis/heteronormativity.

The DSM and Pathology

The argument of sex-positive psychologists, sexologists and researchers is not to

encourage a set of behaviors that everyone should engage in, or to advocate for a certain

kind of sex, but to acknowledge the limitations of conventional normativity as well as the

erotic lives and bodies we have marginalized; including aging bodies, disabled bodies,

BIPOC bodies, queer and trans bodies, as well as those who engage in kink and those

who are polyamorous (Gagnon, 1999; Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Kleinplatz & Diamond,

2014; Ménard et al., 2015; Moser & Kleinplatz, 2006; Schneider, 1999; Simon, 1999).

While every human society has attempted to regulate sexuality, the characteristics

of the dominant groups or practices are never seen as criminal or pathological, despite

how the practices have changed and continue to change over time (Moser & Kleinplatz,

2005). As with other social constructs, dominant members of a given society decide what

is seen as appropriate versus deviant sexual practice (Ewing & Schacht, 2000). As Ewing

and Schacht articulated, "The term 'deviant' tells us more about the ideal, often self-

serving values of the powerful and those in control of a given society than actual sexual

practices or how detrimental they may be" (Ewing & Schacht, 2000, p. 2). For example,

the DSM categories regarding sex, gender and paraphilias have been criticized for

decades as being based in social convention versus on the foundation of empirical data

(Moser & Kleinplatz, 2005). The implications of these classifications have significant

legal, social, and political ramifications, and directly influence the practice of mental

health professionals and the lives of the clients they serve (Kleinplatz & Diamond, 2014;

Moser & Kleinplatz, 2005; Nichols, 2006). In an effort to illustrate the subjective and

arbitrary diagnostic process in general, and to scrutinize the criteria of the DSM

paraphilia specifically, Moser and Kleinplatz (2005) applied the criteria to a common

phenomenon that is not considered a mental illness, but is nonetheless associated with

significant distress and dysfunction – *heterosexuality*. Their somewhat sarcastic but

sound argument followed the diagnostic criteria with common experiences of

heterosexuality and inevitably leads to the conclusion that heterosexuality meets the

DSM criteria for definitions for both a mental disorder and a paraphilia (Moser &

Kleinplatz, 2005). Through this subversion, they further illustrate that the criteria are not

based on any objective scientific definition of disease and are not capable of

distinguishing disease from variance. They argue that diagnostic criteria which can be

valid for the dominant norm cannot be reliable and is therefore fatally flawed and

clinically useless.

Despite these fatal flaws, diagnostic criteria continue to be a contributing factor to

the clinical and medical policing of sexuality and mental health. In a statement from

2013, The National Institute of Mental Health announced it has withdrawn its support of

the DSM, stating it is less a "bible" for mental health, and more a creation of labels with

definitions (Insel, 2013). While the problems with the DSM far exceed the entries that

relate to sexuality, gender and sexual behavior and functioning, without formal education

and unlearning in sexuality, clinicians are sent out into the workforce with potential little

understanding of these flaws and their implications.

The next sections will look at the lack of sexuality education across the lifespan, from primary and secondary school to clinical training.

Sex Education

The Lack of Comprehensive Sex Education Across the Lifespan

The World Health Organization agrees that sex and sexuality are fundamental parts of the human experience, and impact psychological health, relationship satisfaction and over all wellbeing throughout the lifespan (World Health Organization, 2006). Sexuality is an important aspect of identity that has potential to enhance our health through access to pleasure, joy, and connection with ourselves and others. Cultures that embrace sexuality have lower rates of teen pregnancy and STIs, and societies that are more pornography tolerant have lower rates of sex crimes (Donaghue, 2015). The societal myths about what constitutes healthy sexuality and gender have limited our ability to feel good about our desires, be comfortable in our bodies, and enjoy fulfilling sex lives (Donaghue, 2015). The problem is not just what we learn about sex that is limited and dysfunctional, but that we really do not learn at all about healthy sex and relationships that is at the heart of our deficit. The lack of comprehensive sex education contributes to this deficit.

As was illustrated in the literature on heterosexual script, dominant cultural discourse around cis/heteronormative sexuality is communicated through messages and media regardless of formal, in-school education. A lack of sex education in primary and secondary education does not mean that there is a void of education surrounding sex and sexuality. The media and television are eager to step in and take on the role of indoctrination to cultural normativity and the cis/heterosexual script.

Sex Education in Primary and Secondary Schooling

Sex education provided in primary and secondary schools is instrumental in preventing negative health outcomes later in life (SIECUS., 2017). Unfortunately, our country does not place comprehensive sex education as a priority, and instead pushes legislation and funds millions of dollars into abstinence-only curriculums that have no evidence or scientifically based value. As of 2017, only seven states require sex education in schools to be culturally appropriate and inclusive of diverse ethnic backgrounds, disabilities, socioeconomic status, gender identity and sexual orientation (SIECUS, 2017). Similarly, only four states require health education to affirmatively recognize a diverse array of sexual and gender expression, leaving the prior requirement of "inclusivity" to include a negative statement about diverse identities. For example, in a study of LGBTQ youth experience of school climate, only 6% of students surveyed reported classes that positively reflected LGBTQ identities (Kosciw et al., 2016). This has even greater impact on young LGBTQ people of color, who are less likely to have sex education that meets their needs and more likely to experience sexual health disparities (SIECUS, 2017).

Educators set the tone for creating diverse and welcoming environments. Schools' tendencies to perpetuate negative attitudes or "othering" towards LGBTQ people puts them at greater risk of violence and causes significant health disparities, particularly with LGBTQ people of color (Kosciw et al., 2016). Only 11 % of LGBTQ youth of color believe that their racial or ethnic identity is thought of with positive regard in the United States, and 68% of LGBTQ youth say they hear negative messages from elected officials about being LGBTQ (Kosciw et al., 2016). Disabled young people are often entirely absent from sex education, both figuratively and literally. Figuratively in that their

experience and identity is not represented or addressed in sex education curriculums, and literally in that disabled students are given access to the same (albeit insufficient) sex education as their nondisabled peers. The lack of explicit education and inclusion of healthy diverse sexual and gender experiences communicates ableism, cis/heteronormativity and implicit acceptance of oppressive dominant cultural normativity as the standard for all to live up to. This impacts those who are in the margins and those who are not. Attention to detail in the explicit presentation of gender and sexuality in education is long overdue.

Through research on bullying in primary and secondary schools, Meyer (2007) explores how sex and gender boundaries are policed for adolescents, how gender codes seek to limit us, and the use of sexism and heterosexism as a tool for enforcing these norms in our culture. Bullying behaviors act to create and support a social hierarchy that privileges mainstream behaviors and identities over others (Meyer, 2007). This social hierarchy extends beyond the schoolyard and into human services, including mental health. Smith and Shin (2015) assert that a queer examination of "the discourse of heteronormativity" is vital for human service fields, particularly since a large body of research suggests that cisgender and heterosexual individuals often display implicit prejudice towards sexual and gender transgressive minorities (p. 1461).

In the wake of UK legislation that advocates for LGBT inclusivity in Sex and Relationship Education (SRE), Abbott et al. (2015) explored the way in which teachers unintentionally uphold heteronormativity in the classroom. The researchers explored the discursive practices of teachers in a policy climate that promoted inclusivity and found that despite policy and teacher agreement of policy, they implicitly reinforced and

defended heterosexist norms and upheld presumptions of heterosexuality through binary

heteronormative language such as husband and wife. This effectively degrades and

problematizes any diversity in sexual identity. If sexual health were a public health issue

as is often stated, then the teaching of masturbation or mutual masturbation as two of the

"safest" sexual behaviors would be front and center to any curriculum. Instead, these

practices, as just one example cited by researchers, are omitted as sources of sexual

pleasure, and attention is focused on heterosexual penetration as the only acceptable

option (Abbott et al., 2015). "The implication of this is that young people are prevented

from receiving specific information necessary to […] develop sexual competence.

Moreover, the lack of language […] for discussing (all other) sexual practices and desires

acts as a barrier for sexual health" (Abbott et al., 2015, p 1640). At a juncture when

young people are meant to receive vital information, they are often left confused and

isolated, or with limiting misinformation of how to achieve healthy sexuality and

relationships, the absence or presence of which will invariably influence their overall

fulfillment in life.

      The lack of health promoting information does not stop in early education.

Messages from a sex-negative culture and the prevailing patriarchal sex code require

intentional dismantling. Professionals who are beginning their training in undergraduate

and graduate programs require space to interrogate what has been learned and what has

been omitted from their formal and informal education around gender and sexuality. As

previously mentioned, many clinical training programs fail to directly address these

topics. The next section will explore clinical training and sex positivity in counseling

psychology.

Clinical Training and Sexuality

Given the inherently unhealthy dominant cultural norms of sexuality, conflicts and concerns related to healthy sexuality and relationships are often a fundamental driver for motivating individuals of all backgrounds to seek professional support (Burnes, Singh & Witherspoon, 2017b). Unfortunately, clinicians are part of the sex-negative society in which we all grow up, and often enter training with the same lack of education at developmentally critical times, and the same issues with limited understanding of healthy relationships and sexuality. Clinical training programs do not do a good job of bridging this knowledge gap and providing education of human sexuality. Despite the importance of sexuality as an aspect of identity that enhances wellbeing, professional psychology continues to ignore discussing it outside of an illness, thus reinforcing the sex-negative or pathology-based approach. Several mental health disciplines have identified the need for clinicians to move towards sex-positive models that encourage sexual wellbeing and away from pathology-based models (Burnes et al., 2017a; World Health Organization, 2006). Unfortunately, approaches in counseling psychology have "lagged behind" (Burnes et al., 2017a, p. 471). Conversely, counseling psychology is guided by the core values of social justice, resilience, and wellness, providing the rationale for the field to be a leaders in incorporating sex-positive frameworks into training, practice, supervision and research (Burnes et al., 2017a).

Increasing awareness around the role of psychology and the lack of attention and training in sexuality can lead to clinical implications for all clients served. One such example is reviewed below.

Clinical Error of Cis/heteronormativity

A lack of training in sex positivity has implications which include a reluctance to discuss topics of sexuality, thus inhibiting client disclosure, as well as a reluctance and avoidance to treat any sexual concerns that are brought up by the client (Cruz, C., Greenwald, E., & Sandil, 2017; Miller & Byers, 2009; Reissing & Di Giulio, 2010; Walters & Spengler, 2016). Implications for inadequate sexuality training can also include adverse clinical reactions such as embarrassment and anxiety for the clinician and can lead to clinical errors (Ford & Hendrick, 2003; Nichols, 2006; Walters & Spengler, 2016).

Walters and Spengler (2016) detailed one such case of clinical error in the treatment of a cisgender male who was in a relationship with a cis woman and reported being uncomfortable with his own use of pornography. Walters and Spengler (2016) discuss how the clinician's self-identified heteronormative assumptions and confirmatory bias which occurs through vague indirect discussion of sex, led to six weeks of ineffective assessment and treatment, only to find out later that the client was feeling embarrassment due to watching pornography with two cismen engaging in sex, and confusion about what this meant for his identity and relationship (Walters & Spengler, 2016). Operating under the heteronormative assumption that a cisgender male client who has a girlfriend would only be watching pornography that depicted cismen and cis woman engaging in sex led the clinician to miss the concern of the client entirely. The shame that the client felt regarding his enjoyment of watching two cismen engage in sex prevented him from pushing back on the heteronormative assumptions of the therapist and reinforced his own feeling of guilt and shame. Thus, the therapists discomfort can

influence the client's self-perceptions as well as the effectiveness of the therapy in negative ways (Ford & Hendrick, 2003; Wylie et al., 2002).

Clinical training of human sexuality requires both access to information and personal reflection. Clinicians' access to training and perceived knowledge does not always translate into a willingness to actually discuss sex with clients in practice (Burnes, Singh, & Witherspoon, 2017a; Reissing & Di Giulio, 2010). Therefore, beyond basic knowledge of sexual issues, more personal reflections and understanding of bias and experiences is needed for clinical competency in sexuality (Cruz, Greenwald, & Sandil, 2017). Cruz et al. (2017) provide direction and recommendations for therapist skill development, detailing the following areas: (a) exploring personal attitudes and beliefs about sexuality, (b) developing sex-positive knowledge and comfort about sexuality, (c) integrating multiculturalism and social justice into sex-positive practice, (d) proactively raising sex and sexuality as a topic, and (e) knowing the limits of broaching sexuality in therapy. They attest that to work ethically and effectively with clients, sex positivity facilitates greater multicultural competence for counseling psychology (Cruz, Greenwald & Sandil, 2017).

Sex Positivity

Sex positivity describes a position that can be taken by individuals and communities that is free from sex-negative attitudes and emphasizes openness and nonjudgmental mindsets (Cruz, Greenwald & Sandil, 2017). Normative discourse around sexuality in western culture is infused with shame, fear and rigid heteronormative expectations. Sex positivity promotes a more expansive understanding about sexuality and sexual expression (Donaghue, 2015). In a Major Contribution of *The Counseling Psychologist* published in 2017 on sex positivity, Burnes et al. noted that the last Major

Contribution on sexuality and sex counseling was in 1975. They note that the 1975

contribution was full of articles that documented the intersections of counseling and

human sexuality, addressing issues from adolescent sexualities, ways to enhance pleasure

in middle-aged couples, and sexual liberation in older adulthood (Burnes et al., 2017a).

"These articles underscored how counseling psychology values of wellness, resilience,

and strength-based approaches to mental health intersected with sexuality, and also noted

the importance of questioning pathologizing views of sexuality" (Burnes et al., 2017a, p.

473). Unfortunately, since that time most of the published work on sex positivity has

been outside of the counseling and psychology fields (Burnes et al., 2017a). This lack of

published work perhaps mirrors the lack of training in the field and its sordid history.

This lack of training is documented through a number of studies that have shown

sex education in graduate training programs is sparse (Cruz, Greenwald, & Sandil, 2017;

Miller & Byers, 2009; Reissing & Di Giulio, 2010; Wiederman & Sansone, 1999). Cruz,

Greenwald, & Sandil (2017) analyzed scholarship that examined the lack of training in

psychology graduate programs and the lack of competency in addressing issues of sex

and sexuality by practicing psychologists. The results indicate that only 16% of the

graduate programs who responded reported having more than one lecture or seminar

about sexuality. In a survey of 323 graduate training directors of doctoral programs and

internships, Wiederman and Sansone (1999) found that though almost half of the

programs addressed sex-negative aspects of disease in other required coursework, it was

rare for a program to have an entire course on topics related to human sexuality, and 38%

of the programs stated that they provided no training or coursework related to positive or

"typical healthy sexual functioning" (p. 313). In regard to internship programs, most of

the training that was related to sex was in the context of serving gay or lesbian clients, and 71% of the training programs stated that they do not provide training on healthy sexual functioning (Wiederman & Sansone, 1999). In other words, special attention is given to the queer sexualities with no concern of examining the heterosexuality.

Researchers have also investigated practicing clinicians previous training and competencies of issues of sexuality and sex (Miller & Byers, 2009). Only 31% of the sample had taken a course in sexuality (Miller & Byers, 2009). They found that practicing professionals admit to not addressing sex unless it is brought up by the client, and this often only happens in the event that sexual functioning is a source of distress for the client (Cruz, Greenwald & Sandil 2017; Miller & Byers, 2009). "Professional psychology, similar to dominant U.S. society, continues to ignore discussing sex unless it is in the context of a medical or psychological illness, potentially reinforcing a sex-negative approach" (Cruz et al., 2017, p. 550). By continuing to ignore discussing sex outside the context of medical or psychological illness, professional psychology is reinforcing sex negativity (Cruz et al., 2017).

Reissing and DiGiulio (2010) conducted a quantitative research study with psychologists using the Sexual Health Care Provision Questionnaire. The questionnaire assesses the frequency and type of sexual health related issues that arise in session, as well as the comfort level, training received, and treatment approaches used by the therapists. The results show that 76% of respondents report sexuality-based concerns were raised by clients over the last 12 months. Only 10% of the respondents reported being uncomfortable with discussing sexuality, and over 50% reported no training in sexuality competency. Despite these high numbers of comfort and frequency, the

frequency of therapeutic techniques used "very often" ranged from 0% to 10.6 % on a list

of very basic techniques, such as addressing masturbation (1.1%) and addressing issues

of performance anxiety (2.7%). Techniques that require more training such as sensate

focus or specific exercises to target dysfunctions or pleasure were used less, as would be

correlated with lack of training in those areas. Reissing and DiGiulio (2010) note that

assessment and treatment of sexuality-related concerns should be considered a core

competency or cross-cutting competency area in the larger context of the field of clinical

psychology training programs. They call for accurate information in sexual function and

health, as well as basic experience with interventions to be an ethical issue and a must for

training programs. Despite the time constraints in graduate training, the researchers argue

this needs to be a priority (Reissing & Di Giulio, 2010).

Reviewing how current theories within counseling psychology perpetuate sex

negativity and further marginalize people of color, people in the LGBTQ communities,

and people with disabilities (among others), Mosher (2017) integrates historical

contributions from several different fields of study to pose a new paradigm of sex

positivity in counseling psychology. This paradigm includes a break down of body,

relationship, kink and erotopositive understandings necessary for inclusion in counseling

psychology training models to advance awareness, knowledge and skills (Mosher, 2017).

The argument of sex-positive psychologists, sexologists and researchers is to

acknowledge the limitations of conventional normativity as well as the erotic lives and

bodies we have marginalized; including the LGB communities, transgender and

nonbinary people, people with disabilities, people of color, and the elderly (Gagnon,

1999; Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Kleinplatz & Diamond, 2014; Ménard et al., 2015; Moser & Kleinplatz, 2006; Schneider, 1999; Simon, 1999).

The concept of sex positivity is not meant to be incorporated into the existing dominant cultural narratives without being accompanied with sex-positive education and unlearning of dominant discourses. The framework of Critical Sexuality Studies outlined below provides guidance for both research and education in critical sexuality. In addition to the theoretical framework presented in this chapter, the analysis of this work is guided by framework presented below and the attention to where power and sex collide (Fahs, & McClelland, 2016).

Critical Sexuality Studies

Critical sexuality studies and education can provide a framework for both research and education for clinicians. In their conceptualization of critical sexuality studies, Fahs and McClelland (2016) draw upon cues from several interdisciplinary critical moments such as critical psychology (Fox et al., 2009; Teo, 2015), critical race theory (Crenshaw, 1995) and liberation psychology (Martín-Baró, 1996). These critical stances share the investment in examining how power and privilege operate and understanding the role of historical and epistemological violence in research (Fahs & McClelland, 2016; Teo, 2010). According to Fahs and McClelland (2016), critical sexuality studies is "necessarily and decisively feminist, indebted to the practices and modalities of thinking deeply about the social construction of gender, race, class, and sexuality, but also permanently critical, self-reflexive, and radical in its orientation to thinking about sex and sexuality" (p 393). As such, this work is committed to investigating how critical scholarship can build upon the momentum of earlier movements and voices of criticism that erupt from multidisciplinary spaces to uncover

things that have been buried or made invisible by the existing literature (Fahs &

McClelland, 2016).

With particular attention to how research can "better attend to the many ways in

which power and sex collide" (p.393), this dissertation aligns critical sexuality studies

aim to integrate research from multidisciplinary fields of social science, sexuality and

feminist scholarship such as women's and gender studies, ethnic studies, queer and trans

studies, and disability studies.

> [These disciplines trace] the role of power and inequality; applying these critical
>
> lenses to sexuality research means that we must insist on recognizing power
>
> imbalances and remain vigilant to our own blind spots. While critical sexuality
>
> studies tries to describe and explain the social world, it also tries to improve it
>
> (self-critically, with awareness of the hazards of a linear progress narrative) by
>
> striving to be an emancipatory force in its examination of the relationship between
>
> sexuality and the politics of the social (p. 394)

In an effort to develop a framework which can aid researchers who are looking to invest

in a "shared set of critical priorities" and expanding the possibilities for critical exchange

about the relationship between power and sexuality (p. 393), Fahs and McClelland (2016)

outline three epistemological priorities for critical sexuality research: conceptual analysis,

attention to abject bodies, and critical assessment of heterosexual privilege (Fahs &

McClelland, 2016).

This research will operationalize these priorities in organization structure and analysis

Conceptual analysis is a key practice of critical sexuality studies and can involve

several possible strategies including examination of logics and definitions of concepts

commonly used in research (Fahs & McClelland, 2016). Fahs and McClelland (2016) see

this practice as an invitation to examine how the varieties of conceptual meanings may

bring different intentions and insights, rather than determining whether they are

"correct." Lack of consideration toward definitions and their subsequent usage has

adverse effects on various components of research, including but not limited to

theorization, measurement, and analysis (Fahs & McClelland, 2016). Conceptual analysis

can be regarded as a vital aspect necessary to highlight the role of social justice in critical

sexuality studies. This is largely due to conceptual analysis necessitating that the

researcher examines the implications of the concepts themselves, which in turn results in

the acknowledgement of the ways in which power is utilized in generating knowledge

(Fahs & McClelland, 2016). In other words, those who are part of the dominant culture

and therefore hold power, are then "generating knowledge" from that position.

     The second key practice of critical sexuality studies is the attention to abject

bodies. It is crucial that consistent attention be given to abject bodies – that is, "bodies

that are ignored, out of bounds, or pushed out of bounds, as well as groups and

individuals that are consistently hiding in plain sight" (Fahs & McClelland, 2016, p. 393).

This attention should be directed toward abject bodies (e.g., those with sexual pain,

contagious bodies, young and old bodies) as viable sexual beings as opposed to reducing

them to the sexual "other," which will enrich, enhance, and hone the literal bodies that

contribute to our knowledge base (Fahs & McClelland, 2016, p.393).

     The third critical sexuality studies practice that warrants prioritization is an

ongoing confrontation of various presuppositions regarding heterosexuality, whether they

be obscured or apparent (Fahs & McClelland, 2016). By stipulating a decidedly

heteronormative idea of sexuality, which in and of itself is socially constructed, we erase or pathologize the spectrum of experiences and identities that occur outside its rigid concept.

Ultimately, these priorities help describe what critical sexuality work has encompassed in the past and what it can be in the future. I share the viewpoint that Fahs and McClelland (2016) make in stating that critical sexuality studies is "positioned within a larger set of interventions in the social sciences, which imagine the radical potential to interrupt widely held assumptions not only about human behavior but also about how knowledge is made" (p. 394).

Conclusion

In summary, this chapter began with the theoretical framework of this work which includes liberation psychology, queer and Crip theories and settler colonialism. The outlining of these theories highlights the intrinsic connections between them and is further illustrated through the wheel of domination (Mayra, 2020). These intersections cumulate to provide the theoretical orientation from which this research I conducted, and along with the critical sexuality framework, the position which guides the upcoming analysis of data. This chapter continues with a review of the literation that examines the heterosexual script, implications of cis/heteronormativity on the cis/heteronormative and the history of psychology in the pathologizing of "the other" and rigid concepts of "normal."

This literature review chapter has taken examples from the plethora of research from several fields of study which focuses on the pervasiveness and impact of cis/heteronormativity, the history of psychology and sexuality and the need for comprehensive sex education in clinical training. As discussed, there are several gaps in

the research specific to the field of counseling psychology and the focus of covert

cis/heteronormativity that this research aims to fill. With an attempt to synthesize several

silos of interdisciplinary knowledge, this research aims to contribute to critical sexuality

studies in counseling psychology and the development of liberatory consciousness around

cis/heteronormativity.

In the following chapter, I will outline my critical epistemological stance and the

rationale for the use of critical discourse analysis to illuminate the use of language as a

point of analysis and potential site for liberatory actions in clinical discourse.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

This chapter includes statements of my epistemological stance and methodology, in addition to the research design of this study as well as the methodological applications of critical discourse analysis. Guided by my research question: "How is cis/heteronormativity reproduced and/or challenged in everyday sexuality and gender discourses?" this research analyzes data from the public realm in the form of podcasts which focus on topics of sexuality and relationships. Tracing the alignment of my theoretical orientation, epistemology, methodology and design will orient the reader to the research and illuminate the ways in which power and oppression are infused in discursive practices.

Critical Epistemology

All social research is inherently tethered to the philosophical world view of the researcher (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Likewise, I share the value orientation of critical researchers. From a critical epistemological perspective, the nature of reality is that power dynamics infiltrate all our experiences (Carspecken, 1996). An individual's perceptions of truth are only a narrow sliver of the greater picture since the power is often unseen, often unknowingly embedded in our perceptions (Carspecken, 1996). Critical researchers seek to illuminate power and deconstruct it, making the implicit explicit, and bringing the unconscious into consciousness.

Furthermore, critical epistemology has the goal of emancipation and transformation (Ponterotto, 2005). Researchers who employ a critical stance are concerned with social inequities and direct their work towards social change (Carspecken, 1996). The basic assumptions and value orientation that critical researchers accept are best summarized by Kincheloe and McLaren (1994):

All thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations

that are socially and historically constituted; [b] facts can

never be isolated from the domain of values or removed

from some form of ideological inscription; [c] language is

central to the formation of subjectivity; [d] certain groups

in society are privileged over others; [e] oppression has

many faces and that focusing on one at the expense of

others often elides the interconnections among them; and

[f] mainstream research practices are generally implicated

in the reproduction of systems of class, race, and gender

oppression (pp. 139–140)

Carspecken (1996) expands upon this shared value orientation, highlighting the need for

critical research to be used to counter oppression and to support efforts for social and

cultural change. Critical researchers acknowledge that mainstream research is most often

unwittingly part of the oppression. What has passed for neutral objective science is not

neutral at all, but instead favors privileged groups. Use of this assumed "neutral"

information is part of the inequitable social structures which perpetuate oppression.

Instead of reproducing inequities, research can uncover the subtleties of oppression so

that its invisibility can be unveiled, and oppression might become challenged and

changed (Carspecken, 1996).

        As a key organizing principle in society, cis/heteronormativity and whiteness

function as "neutral," or an invisible "default" against which all else are "othered" (Arvin

et al., 2013; Foucault, 1978; McRuer, 2006a). Such "othering" prevents interrogation of

the neutral or default. This research seeks to interrogate such defaults and false neutrality

that reinforces white supremacy culture and its relationships to concepts gender and

sexuality.

Essential to my critical epistemology is the commitment of critical bifocality, or

the dedication to theoretical and empirical attention to both structures and lives (Weis &

Fine, 2012). Critical bifocality can "render visible the relations between groups to

structures of power, to social policies, to history, and to large sociopolitical formation"

(Weis & Fine, 2012, p. 173). As outlined in the previous chapters, normative claims

around sexuality and gender have historical roots and current day connections to

colonization, capitalism, and white supremacy. This research seeks to illuminate these

macro connections in current day discursive practices, and the micro-level implications.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Discourse Analysis is a theoretical approach to studying the role of language in

society, and a methodological framework that focuses on the analysis of spoken or

written texts (Given, 2008; Motschenbacher, 2014; Wodak, 2001). More specifically for

my research, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a type of discourse analysis research

that primarily studies the ways in which "social power abuse, dominance, and inequality

are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context"

(van Dijk, 2005, p. 349). As such, researchers employing CDA and its dissident stance

take an explicit position in wanting to expose and resist social inequalities (van Dijk,

2005). As illustrated and discussed in the previous chapters, this research takes a strong

and explicit position regarding the power dynamics and systemic oppression that

surrounds dominant narratives of gender and sexuality at several layers of analysis, such

as the individual, interpersonal and structural levels. As with other critical theories, CDA

rejects the possibility of value-free science, and therefore acknowledges that power and

social structures are inherent in our discourse. Language is "central to the formation of

subjectivity" and frequently occurs on the micro level, often as a reflection or

perpetuation of the messages on the structural and institutional level (Kincheloe and

McLaren, 1994, p.139). These structural and institutional messages are illuminated in this

research through interrogation of cis/heteronormativity at the discursive relational level.

Through my analysis I explore how cis/heteronormativity is performed and maintained or

challenged and resisted in through discursive interactions.

Normativity and Discourse

The cis/heteronormative hierarchy upholds the most favored forms of gender and

sexuality as "monogamous, reproductive and conventional [binary] gender roles"

(Coates, 2013, p. 538). Chapter 2 illustrated how these ideas are connected to settler

colonialism, white supremacy, and capitalism. Whiteness, therefore, is part of the

invisible ontological given of our current experiences, which requires deliberate

interrogation and unlearning (Ahmed, 2017). Discourse is a powerful way in which

individuals produce and reproduce, as well as orient themselves to what is "normal and

acceptable" (Coates, 2013). The construction of the fixed link between cisgenderism and

heterosexuality, and policing of "normative" experiences and expressions are essential to

the maintenance of such hierarchy (Coates, 2013, p. 538) While there is a growing body

of research on normativity as a "universal explanation for gendered and sexualized

behavior" or social macro norms, scholars have identified a need for attention on how

normativity manifests itself locally (Motschenbacher, 2014, p. 51). Language bends our

thoughts and actions towards a particular orientation, which then limits understanding

and possibility of alternative positions. This research includes attention to the influence

of normativity on "linguistic behavior" in concrete interactional contexts, and how power

plays a role in what is perceived as normative (Motschenbacher, 2014, p. 51).

As an example, in everyday interactions of western culture there is a well-

developed lexicon of heterosexual references (Coates, 2013). By using these references,

speakers identify themselves as heterosexual or position themselves to a dominant

cis/heteronormative discourse (Coates, 2013). Often, the use of discourse to reinforce

dominant ideology is taken for granted by the speakers, particularly due to the way

cis/heteronormativity has been "naturalized" and constructed as an invisible or default

category (Coates, 2013). These explicit and simple everyday words provide a great deal

of ideological labor in the service of sustaining oppression. This can be seen in the

example of a common question from the non-caregiver adult to the young presumed-to-

be-female toddler: "Do you have a boyfriend?" The impact of this question has is that it

effectively erases any possibility and opportunity outside of the clearly assumed

cis/heteronormativity. In the power dynamic of adult/child, the onus is placed on the

receiver to challenge and push back on an oppressive assumption that erases their

experience, or they are left to remain quiet and invisible. In other words, the emotional

labor is therefore in the hands of the marginalized, as per usual. All too commonly the

result of this push back can be violence in the form of hate crimes and the high number of

violent murders of transgender women of color, and thus the risk is high.

Often, the presence of normative expectations can be especially present in settings

where clinical support or "expert advice" is being sought out. The power relations

between the seeker of such advice and the "expert" identified as having the answers can

either reinforce existing oppressive structures, or purposefully challenge them. Therefore,

clinicians are uniquely positioned to contribute to social change, but their positions of

power also place them at risk for the perpetuation of normativity. By highlighting the

ways in which clinicians are participating in the perpetuation and reproduction of

oppression, this research can also create a call to action and plan for clinicians. Therefore,

the scope of this research is to use CDA to illuminate the ways in which clinicians can

reduce the reproduction of this power inequity and the harm of cis/heteronormativity, and

how they can reproduce the harm. The use of CDA is also in alignment with my

theoretical and epistemological orientations, by addressing the use of language to

illuminate power dynamics and contribute to the disruption of cis/heteronormativity in

service of collective liberation and liberation health.

Researcher's Reflexivity

As presented in Chapter 1, reflexivity is the practice of examining the researcher's

own beliefs, judgments and practices throughout the research process, including

interrogating underlying assumptions (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Morrow, 2005, 2007).

Patton (2012) identifies reflexivity as a way of emphasizing the "importance of self-

awareness, political/cultural consciousness and ownership of one's perspective" (p 64). In

alignment with my critical epistemology and methodology, I acknowledge and embrace

the subjectivity of critical analytic processes (Morrow, 2005). As a critical researcher, my

positioning is integral to the data interpretation and this research is "unapologetically

political in purpose" (Morrow, 2005, p.254). Due to the value I place on researcher

reflexivity, I chose not to limit it to a small mention or section and have instead woven

my positionality throughout this document. This includes interrogating my implicit

assumptions and biases and making them overt to others (Morrow, 2005). I employ

several practices for self-reflection in my personal and professional life including journaling, focused meditation, and peer consultation. Strategies for ongoing reflexivity through the data collection and analysis included a great deal of journaling to record my experiences, emerging awareness of assumptions, and self-awareness or understandings (Morrow, 2005). I also value the depth of knowledge that I have gained through peer debriefing and consultation throughout this entire process – from inception and design through analysis and interpretation. My own "community of practice" includes several groups of extremely knowledgeable clinicians and scholars with whom I engage in deep critical discussion, who hold be accountable in my own reproduction of oppressive normativity (Rossman & Rallis cited in Morrow 2005).

Being grounded in a critical perspective, my discourse analysis begins with reconstructive analysis and the ways in which power, both as oppressive and empowerment, are instantiated, reproduced or otherwise resisted or challenged in the discussion of sexuality or experiences of sex that occur in the samples of podcasts collected.

Research Design

In this research, critical discourse analysis is employed to examine data in the public domain of podcasts where the discussion of sexuality, sex, gender, and relationships are present. Detailed explanations and descriptions of the data source, sampling, analytic framework, and data analysis is provided below.

Data Source: Podcasts

A podcast is a digital audio file that is available on the internet for listeners to stream or download. Podcast production can range from a highly funded and distributed production, to a more DIY project that only requires a microphone and recording device,

allowing for a range of people to be able to create, produce and distribute their ideas and

work to a large audience. Hosting platforms range from technically complex to simple

and free.

     This media is widely accessible in the United States through various online

directories. Depending on an individuals' access to technology and the internet, these

directories and podcasts are often at no cost to the listener and the range of topics can

address anything from current news analysis, to entertainment, to self-help. However, as

an auditory media, podcasts are not accessible to a deaf audience and official transcripts

of the episodes were not readily available on the platforms or directories.

     The choice of podcasts as a data source provided several benefits to this research

design. Wodak (2001) states the importance of analyzing language within the larger

content of analyzing social practices and to have a sense of the social practices it is

important to include both academic and nonacademic sources. The use of podcasts as a

data source provides an opportunity to analysis discourse around sexuality and gender

through a nonacademic data source. Additionally, podcasts are an example of naturalistic

occurring data versus data that is generated by research (Lester & Paulus, 2014). This

allows for the data to be a sample from daily life, or the ability sample conversations that

are accessible to, and directed towards the general population. In this way, it could be

more relevant or reflective of the dominant cultural narratives.

     While there are several strengths to the use of podcasts as a data source, there are

also limitations. An audio file does not allow for observation of behaviors, body language

or facial expressions, limiting any ability to do a full embodied analysis (Carspecken,

1996). There is no ability to member check with the podcast hosts or participants to

discuss findings. No ability to confirm harm or liberations. Positively, there exists a range

of data – however, conversely, no common discussion is present to compare different

answers or opinions regarding the same interview questions. This yields a complex array

of different levels of discourse requiring further analysis to distill themes and organize

findings.

Data Collection: Podcast Sampling

Initial podcast sampling began with keyword searches in the iTunes podcast

directory. The keywords used were *sex advice, sex education, sex ed, sexual health,*

sexuality, sex, sex therapy, and *advice.* Each keyword search resulted in a list of "top ten"

relevant podcasts and a separate list of specific podcast episodes. For several weeks

during the Fall of 2019, I performed repeated keyword searches, took screenshots and

began to get a sense of which particular podcasts were showing up regularly and in

multiple searches. I then navigated to the specific podcasts where the list of episodes is

shown and can be sorted from most recent episode and includes a "popularity rating."

These popularity ratings are reflective of mainstream discourse on sexuality in this

context, and as such, I chose episodes based on popularity whose titles seemed relevant to

the keyword searches. It became clear that the initial searches were heavily focused on a

monogamous, heterosexual audience and many of the hosts fit this category and were

also white with no mention of disability. To assist in additional searches for podcasts that

are popular with expanded demographics and interests, I turned to my personal and

professional communities for an informal poll and simply asked: "What podcasts do you

recommend that talk about sexuality and gender?" Examples of responses included

American Sex, *Trauma Queen*, and *Disability After Dark*; podcasts which feature hosts

who were disabled, Black, queer, transgender, and/or nonbinary. Additional episodes

were sampled from these podcasts were then downloaded to fill in gaps. Episodes were chosen that included search words in their title, and where it was clear the episode included discourse on sex, sex education and sexuality. The goal here was to expand both the intended audiences and hosts positionality and therefore potentially expand the discourse that was analyzed.

Historical context is an important factor in CDA, as social practices and the use of language changes with sociopolitical contexts (Wodak, 2007). Language and cultural norms are dynamic and ever-evolving, therefore making the time period in which the data was recorded a relevant factor. For this reason, I chose to limit the podcasts from 2015 to present. The rationale for this timeframe is the shift in mainstream discourse that has occurred over the last decade and particularly in the past 5 years. While issues around heteronormativity and critical discourse analysis have been discussed for decades in different subcultures, it has only been recently that these topics have been more present in the mainstream.

In summary, the initial searches of top ten podcasts occurred in September and October of 2019 and yielded fifteen episodes across nine separate podcasts. The remaining podcasts were identified through recommendations and specific searches to diversify the content to include the communities and topics covered in this dissertation (i.e. sex and disability). A total of 21 episodes were collected from 13 podcasts. The date range of the episodes is from August 2015 to November 2019, with most of the episodes being from 2019 (n=18), in addition to four from 2018 and one from 2015. The 2015 episode was sought out specifically in a search for a sex educator named Laci Green who was referenced in the *Trauma Queen* episode.

To assist in the initial organization of the podcast episodes, which included

exploring the background of the data, I created a chart outlining pertinent information of

host and guest, basic content and format. The program format of the episodes was easily

organized into two categories: A guest interview with the host (n=12) or the host

responds to listener/caller questions (n=9). This chart coalesced into Table 1 which is

included below and listed in alphabetical order of podcast title.

Table 3.1. is further discussed in the data analysis section that follows.

Data Analysis

Preparing the Data Source

Audio files of the podcast episodes were downloaded and electronically

transcribed by the online program Otter.ai and were then uploaded into MAXQDA

Analytics Pro 2018. I initially listened to each podcast episode in full to orient myself to

the content and basic structure of each episode. This allowed me to be in the position of

the audience or listener, as opposed to position of researcher. I made notes on my initial

questions and impressions of the topic, hosts, guests and overall content. I then listened to

each podcast again alongside the transcript and focused on editing and cleaning the

transcript for accuracy and ease of use. The lack of access to official transcripts can also

create more opportunity for error in my own transcriptions and editing. Qualitative

methods of memo writing and consultation have allowed me to document and investigate

my reactions and ongoing reflections as I began to engage with the data.

Table 3.1: Full Podcast List

Citation used in text	Host name and Tagline	Date of episode	Podcast Title & Episode	Guest interview or Caller Q&A
Megatron & Melvoin-Berg, 2019	Sunny Megatron Ken Melvoin-Berg "Sex educators, pleasure advocates, and kinky pervs, too"	10/21/2019	*American Sex*; "Sex Ed and Social Justice in the south with @SexologyBae"	@Sexologybae Alex
Jameson, 2019a	Sean Jameson "Have better sex tonight"	5/13/2019	*Bad Girls Bible*; "#47 How to have sex everyday with Caitlyn and Michael Doemner"	Caitlyn and Michael Doemner
Jameson, 2019b	Sean Jameson	6/21/2019	*Bad Girls Bible*; "#31 How to fix a sexless marriage and reignite fiery passion with Laurie Watson"	Laurie Watson LMFT, AASECT certified sex therapist
Sal, 2019a	Anna Sal	1/9/2019	*Death, Sex and Money*; "I wanted to be a 'good girl'"	'Andrea'
Sal, 2019b	Anna Sal	1/14/2019	*Death Sex and Money*; "So many Sex ed Fails"	Callers
Gurza, 2018a	Andrew Gurza "shining a bright light on sex and disability"	3/30/2018	*Disability After Dark*; "Episode 079: Introducing Power Puppy - My fascination with pup play and disability"	Host
Gurza, 2018b	Andrew Gurza	5/2/2018	*Disability After Dark*; "Minisode 11"	Listener letter
Schlessinger, 2019b	Laura Schlessinger "Americas #1 marriage, family and parenting expert"	10/11/2019	*Dr. Laura Call of the Day*; "On again off again relationships"	Caller
Schlessinger, 2019a	Laura Schlessinger	5/28/19	*Dr. Laura Call of the Day*; "Am I	Caller

			ready to get married? / Not feeling a sexual spark"	
McLaughlin & Neal, 2015	Rhett McLaughlin and Charles Lincoln Neal	8/21/2015	*Ear Biscuits*; "Episode 83: Laci Green"	Laci Green
Connell & Botsford, 2019a	Sara Connell and Jay Botsford "pleasure is a basic human right"	2/14/2019	*Queer Sex Ed*; "QSE Listener Questions 3"	Caller questions
Connell & Botsford, 2019b	Sara Connell and Jay Botsford	4/27/2019	*Queer Sex Ed*; "Episode 54: The future of Trans liberation"	Host
Kosterlitz & Kosterlitz, 2019a	Chase and Sarah Kosterlitz "#1 marriage and dating podcast in itunes"	10/10/2019	*I do/Relationship Advice*; "Episode 219 How to Negotiate the Frequency of Sex"	David Luden, Phd; professor of psychology
Kosterlitz & Kosterlitz, 2019b	Chase and Sarah Kosterlitz	10/30/2019	*I do/Relationship Advice*; "Episode 222: Create more sexual intimacy in your relationship"	Judy Sheel PhD LCSW
Kosterlitz & Kosterlitz, 2019c	Chase and Sarah Kosterlitz	11/13/2019	*Relationship Advice*; "Episode 224: Exploring your sexuality"	Pam Costa
Savage, 2019	Dan Savage "Love and Sex advice from Americas sweetheart"	9/3/2019	*Savage Lovecast*; "Money and Vaginas"	Caller questions
Lauriston & Domino, 2019	Charla Lauriston Lauren Domino "how do the Black women we admire stay incredibly phenomenal?"	08/28/2019	*Secret Lives of Black Women*; "Sex and Power with Numa Perrier"	Numa Perrier

Morse, 2019	Emily Morse "Saving the world, one orgasm at a time"	8/21/2019	*Sex With Emily*; "Porn PSA: A guide on what not to do in bed"	Caller questions
Moali, 2019a	Nazanin Moali, Phd	10/1/2019	*Sexology*; "Saying yes to pleasure with Dalychia Saah"	Dalychia Saah, professor, afrosexology cofounder
Moali, 2019b	Nazanin Moali, Phd "Sexuality and Pleasure from a scientific perspective"	10/15/2019	*Sexology*; "Cultivating Positive Body Image using BDSM"	Elizabeth Newsome, LCSW
Eborn, 2019	Jimaneka Eborn "Let's heal together"	4/30/2019	*Trauma Queen*; "Decolonizing Sex Ed with Ericka Hart"	Ericka Hart; sex educator professor

Note: Figure 3.1 is sorted by alphabetical order of Podcast title followed by episode date for podcasts with more than one episode collected in the data.

Exploring Background of Data

An additional step of the data analysis often includes exploring background of the data or text (Mullet, 2018). For my research this included the characteristics of the podcast, intended audience and purpose, and the characteristics of the author or host and guest if applicable (Mullet, 2018). For this step I created a table for the description of each podcast and the description of each specific episode used in the data source. Both descriptions were copied from the iTunes directory or the website of the podcast.

The total number of podcast episodes collected was 21. These episodes can initially be organized into two categories – those in which the host addressed emails or calls from listeners who have personal questions they are seeking information or advice

on, and those that are discussions or interviews between the podcast host and a guest or

specialist on the identified topic wherein the host asks advice or questions on behalf of

themselves and or audience. Table 1 shows the full list of podcast episodes that were

analyzed in this research, including the name of the podcast, hosts and title of the

episode. Table 1 also shows the citation for each episode that will be used to indicate

quotes and references in the upcoming finding chapters.

The sample of podcast episodes includes a range of topics addressed in content, as

well as a range addressed in implicit or invisible and embedded content. However, the

implied invitation of the podcasts appears to be the same – "Please join us (the host or

creator) while we discuss this topic of sexuality as it applies to us and the questions we

have." On many levels, it makes sense that the individual who creates a podcast has a

personal interest in the topic chosen. They have found a need in their life or in their

community that they seek to fill, and questions they seek to answer with the podcast as a

whole and the specific focus of the episodes. For this reason, the positionality and

identity of the hosts and guests invited is especially relevant (the systems of oppression

that an individual is able to identify as a factor). There were many podcasts in which the

positionality of the host, guest and/or callers was made explicitly clear. This includes

race, pronouns, sexual orientation, and disability status. However, there were many

episodes where these positions were neither included nor named. In direct connection to

my research question and examining the ways in which discourse can challenge or

reproduce oppressive normativity, the distinguishing factor is the presence or absence of

structural critiques. In episodes that included a structural critique, the heteronorms and

systems of oppression were named and interrogated or challenged, while in episodes that

did not include an explicit structural critique, the heteronorms and therefore systems of oppression, were reproduced.

Preliminary Reconstructive Analysis

Preliminary reconstructive analysis includes initial speculations of the meanings and interactions in the data, and "reconstructs" implicit or tacit understandings into explicit and subjective factors (Carspecken, 1996). Carspecken (1996) describes that the first steps of initial meaning reconstruction occur through a circular process that begins with a holistic, hermeneutic understanding and then involves "movement from tactic (intuitive and undifferentiated) toward explicit (delineated and differentiated)" and then back again to the holistic (p. 95). Personally, the first step of this process took place through several readings and listening of the podcasts to become familiar with recurring patterns and unusual events, accompanied by memo writing impressions, ideas and low-level coding in MAXQDA. To assist in my initial understanding and mental organization of the range of data collected, ongoing low-level coding of themes and content was created with relatively low levels of inference; for example, "explicit statement of emotion" or "mention of sex education or lack of sex education." Initial selection of segments that were representative for explicit meaning reconstruction began to be revealed. Meaning fields are possible interpretations of interactions that are initially experienced from the tacit and raised to discourse (Carspecken, 1996). The addition of preliminary meaning fields was recorded through in-document memos, which helped to articulate multiple possibilities of possible meaning.

Methodological Reflections: Preliminary Reconstructive Analysis

This stage of analysis was extremely time-consuming and at times overwhelming, due to the vast amount of discourse in the sample, and the range of topics and knowledge

levels of the different podcast hosts and guests. During the early stages of engaging with

the data, there were several times when I experienced emotional reactions ranging from

anger and disgust towards oppressive and harmful misinformation being provided in an

episode, to energized and inspired by the deep level of analysis and illustration of

liberatory impact in others. It was difficult to resist the desire to hold on to these initial

assumptions and create binary categories. These feelings of partiality were recorded and

interrogated through reflection and consultation. The awareness of these initial

assumptions, a deep engagement with the data and an iterative process provided multiple

opportunities to move beyond preliminary binary impressions into a richer analysis and

understanding.

Meaning Reconstruction and Hermeneutics

        Though initial meaning reconstruction is highly subject to error in terms of

researcher bias, they are highly valuable and can assist in identifying additional

reconstructions and issues to be explored (Carspecken, 1996). The features of a

"hermeneutic circle" outlined by Carspecken (1996) provided useful guidance in a

process with no definite procedures that is dictated by epistemology and often occurs

outside of awareness. (To employ it consciously). The first feature is the intersubjective

quality of meaning. In order to articulate possible impressions and meaning of

experienced by the people involved it is important to take a performative attitude and

occupy a subjective position from a variety of perspectives (i.e. the position of the

intended podcast audience, the guest speaker, the creator or host, the unintended

audience/accidental listener). Position-taking allows for recognition of meaning through

the use of cultural typifications (Carspecken, 1996). "Cultural typifications and

generalities, grasped tacitly, are the broadest structures through which we recognize

situations as meaningful" (p. 99). This recognition is dependent on familiarity with the culture and the ability be deliberate in experiencing meaning through our own typifications and then the separate experience of (possible) meaning by altering the typifications to conform more closely with those employed by the subject. This allows for several possible meanings to emerge. The process of moving in and out of position perspectives and possible meaning recognition can occur quite rapidly, and articulating features of a cultural typifications immediately pushes up against norms, making it vital to examine why these possible meanings came to mind. This is an important part of the hermeneutic process and what Carspecken (1996) calls "normative reflection" (p.100).

Methodological Reflections in Meaning Reconstruction

In my normative reflection I examined the development of my cultural typifications through several identities and references. On a macro level, I grew up personally and professionally in the cis/heteronormative and white supremacist culture common to the United States. As a white cisgender woman who has prioritized the interrogation of these structures over the past 25 years, I am intimately familiar with the general "knowledge" and ideas that are present on the inside of these communities. Upon understanding and embracing my identity as a queer person in the early 1990s, my position of "other" provided an ability to begin to better "see" the implicit norms associated with those structures more clearly and from an invisible outsider stance. My position of "other" also afforded me entrance into a subculture that deeply influenced the way I make meaning in the world, as well as the cultural typifications from which I primarily draw. My introduction to the queer subculture, situated within a very specific historical time and developmental stage, is also bound to additional positions I hold, such as middle class, access to higher education, and currently nondisabled.

These experiences allow me a framework to take multiple positions, though none may be accurate beyond my own experience. For example, there are many LGBTQ individuals and communities that are cis/heteronormative.

Validity

Carspecken (1996) asserts that research is always value driven, and the "validity claims of the researcher must meet certain conditions to avoid bias" (p. 8). This includes close examination of knowledge and the concept of truth which were explored in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, and further explored in my epistemological stance. This is vital to validity in that the theoretical and epistemological transparency and awareness of the researcher impacts the research. In addition to this transparency, my conceptual framework for validity contains three parts:

- Validity as research praxis (Dennis, 2018)

- Psychopolitical validity, or transformative impact (Prilleltensky, 2003)

- Validity of interpretation and peer consultation

Validity claims in critical research are also dependent on strong reflexivity of the researcher, as well as examination of what the researcher's identity brings to the work. This impacts validity, as no research is value-free, and objectivity is delusional; the use of reflexivity on the part of the researcher is a tool for understanding and illuminating both the stance of the researcher and the assumptions that come into the research. The assumptions of my critical epistemology, outlined above, and particularly regarding my understanding of power and privilege are deeply woven into the analysis and framework of this study. My ongoing reflection and examination during the research shift me

towards deeper engagement in the process. Dennis (2018) identifies a praxis oriented validity that draws upon three conceptual characteristics:

- Praxis is a validity-dependent identity securing social accomplishment

- Validity of all truth claims will have self/identity validity embedded within them

- Validity is self-reflective (p.111)

 Thus, my engagement with material, my reflexivity during that process and my own experiences and knowledge of cis/heteronormativity provide validity in that my self and identity are embedded in the analysis.

Psychopolitical Validity

Prilleltensky (2003) developed a framework and criteria for psychopolitical validity. Psychopolitical validity outlines the standards to evaluate the liberatory potential of the research. To be psychopolitically valid, the research must be informed by knowledge of power dynamics and oppression at every level and produce transformative action toward liberation in personal, interpersonal, or structural domains (Prilleltensky, 2003; L. Smith et al., 2009). In this study, the illumination and increased understanding of cis/heteronormative discourse can assist in the prioritizing training for clinicians and increase personal and professional awareness of the far-reaching and liberatory impact of discursive practice in these domains.

Because the possibility of member checking is not an option in the research design, I heavily utilized peer consultation and journaling throughout the process as a strategy to track assumptions and processes. In addition, I heavily relied on my own therapy to explore my assumptions and reactions as they related to my personal and

professional life and experiences. Self-reflection/examination is an ongoing and lifelong

process and is especially important in any work as a counselor and/or movement towards

equity and justice. Normalizing therapy, including therapy for therapists, is important in

our collective healing. This has assisted in providing an additional layer of validity and in

addressing some ethical concerns that I will elaborate on below.

Ethical Considerations

The nature of a critical epistemological stance that is aligned with my theoretical

orientation and methodology choices means that I have a strong ethical commitment to

exposing oppressions, and to consciously engage in resistance and efforts to reduce

reproducing them. This commitment must be backed up by my ability to remain open to

being challenged throughout the process through peer consultation and close work with

my dissertation committee members. No matter how committed a researcher may be, to

some extent there is always a degree of reproduction. Critical qualitative research seeks

to create an ethically responsible approach to research that includes the goals of placing

voices of the oppressed at the center of inquiry, and using inquiry to reveal sites for social

change and activism (Denzin, 2017). The inspiration for this research is based in decades

of collaboration with communities, clients, colleagues, in addition to the wealth of

knowledge that I have learned from teachers, mentors and authors who have been

marginalized, as well as my own personal experiences. However, my commitment to

respecting the voices of those who collaborate as participants in research is an area of

concern with this methodology design, as I am not generating new data and therefore

lacking collaboration. This design places me as the researcher in an isolated, academic,

and privileged position that needs to be acknowledged and is explored throughout the

analysis.

Chapter Summary

In summary, through a critically aligned epistemological stance and methodology, this research focuses on consciousness raising and deconstructing the way cis/heteronormativity is reproduced in discursive practices. The first findings section, Chapter 4, is focused on the discourse and experiences regarding sex mis/education across the lifespan as well as the experiences in the role of sex educator. By focusing on discursive practices in sexuality and gender that do not contain a structural analysis, Chapter 5 of this research highlights specific ways in which oppressive cis/heteronormativity can go unchallenged and thus reproduced. Alternatively, the final findings of Chapter 6 provide examples of much more expansive discourse which integrates a structural analysis. The number of possible expressions and experiences of gender and sexuality are as great as the number of people that exist. In contrast, compulsory heteronormativity and the oppressive definition of normal can suppress the possibility for authentic expressions and experiences (Donaghue, 2015). Many people, including clinicians, are unwittingly compliant in the reproduction of oppression through discursive practices. At the same time, discourse can be used in the service of liberation. In addition to consciousness raising of cis/heteronormativity and embedded structures such as settler colonialism and anti-Blackness, and the potential emancipatory and liberatory implications through the use of conceptual analysis, attention to abject bodies and the challenging of heterosexual privilege, I hope this research will contribute to knowledge base of critical sexuality research and bring further attention to challenging cis/heteronormativity in clinical training programs.

Structure of Findings Chapters

My initial research question of "how can clinicians replicate or challenge cis/heteronormativity through clinical discourse?" could in and of itself serve as an example of the binary thinking I seek to resist. It is not a question of replicate OR challenge, it is a question of how we can more effectively understand our abilities to do both, because we will all inevitably replicate systems of oppression in some way at some point because we live within these systems even as we seek to resist and form ideas of what could be. This question was then shifted to "How is cis/heteronormativity reproduced and/or challenged in everyday sexuality and gender discourses?" which lends to the sub-question of "how can clinicians reproduce and/or challenge cis/heteronormativity in sexuality and gender discourse?" Despite this, the limitations of language are that concepts and ideas can easily be simplified in ways we don't intend, and thus complexity lost. Additionally, the lure of simplicity that binary thinking offers can be difficult to resist. In the organization and presentation of the upcoming findings chapters, I have been continually aware of the desire to simplify by creating a presentation of binary categories of comparison: sex-negative vs. sex-positive, replication vs. challenging, oppressive vs. liberatory, marginalized vs. privileged. I remain aware of this as I write and am also aware that I will make mistakes. I am seeking to learn from the example of the speakers in the podcasts presented in Chapter 6, who modeled multiplicity, reflexive accountability and action towards justice and liberation. In the end, I have presented the findings in 3 Chapters which focus on (Ch. 4) sex mis/education (Ch.5) discourse that lacks structural analysis (Ch. 6) discourse that infuses structural analysis. The analysis of data and the presentation of the findings was further guided by

the critical sexuality studies framework and sex positivity which are reviewed again below.

Critical Sexuality Studies Framework

The critical sexuality studies framework introduced in Chapter 2 guided initial coding strategies at low-level inferences and in complimentary directions; namely, the presence of the 3 practices prioritized, as well as the absence of such practices. To recap the framework, critical sexuality studies prioritize three main practices: conceptual analysis, attention to abject bodies, and challenging heterosexual privilege. Conceptual analysis involves examine and addressing social justice issues and sexuality through a critical lens. This can include expansive definitions of concepts that connect to, or challenge oppressive systems. The absence of conceptual analysis can be identified when there is no clarification about terms, underlying assumptions, or alternative meanings.

Secondly, attention to abject bodies refers to the idea that individuals or groups that have historically been "othered" or outright ignored as sexual beings will be given priority. This means more than a mere mention or afterthought, but purposeful attention. Attention to abject bodies as outlined in previous chapters is the attention to bodies that often ignored, silenced, or "out of bounds" when it comes to discussion or sex or sexuality, and specifically ownership or experience of pleasure. The bodies that are prioritized by dominant cultural narrative and norms reflect Eurocentric/white beauty standards and "ideals" which are often unattainable, unrealistic, and unhealthy – although ironically, they are often passed off as the health standard. The exclusion of abject bodies answers cultural questions of who is permitted to be sexual, who is permitted to experience pleasure, and who is allowed to be desired. Exclusion can also occur through silence and assumptions. In alignment with my theoretical orientation of Crip theory, I

am particularly looking for disabled experiences and discourse which promotes the

sexuality and sexual experiences of disabled bodies.

The third practice of challenging heterosexual privilege can also be framed as

challenging heteronormativity. This is illustrated by decentering the cisgender

heterosexual experience as illustrated at length in Chapter 6, where expansive

conversations about queer, trans and nonbinary experiences are prioritized, as well as the

acknowledgement of whiteness and white privilege in such experiences. What is

important to note is that heterosexuality is not excluded in these decentering practices. In

discourse that does not challenge heterosexual privilege, this can be illustrated through a

lack of acknowledgement that the discourse is addressing a heterosexual experience, but

rather assuming a partnership includes two cisgender people of 'opposite sex' or

assumptions of rigid gender roles and expectations as the norm.

Chapter 4 Findings: Sex Mis/Education

This chapter is the first of three in which the findings of this research and analysis are presented. The explicit discussion of the lack of sex ed in a person's life was the main topic of several episodes and a subtopic in others. The lack of comprehensive, medically accurate sex education results in a great deal of misinformation and confusion, impacting the individual's relationship with self and others. With the exception of the podcast *Disability after Dark,* which is produced in Toronto Canada, these podcasts were recorded and produced in the United States and therefore it is reasonable to assume the discourse is based within norms and culture of the United States unless the speaker otherwise states.

A thematic analysis of the content on sex education is provided here as foundational context for the next two chapters of findings in this research. This chapter reveals experiences of sex mis/education, or complete lack of sex education as reported in data, resulting in of confusion and shame including the role of religion in perpetuating oppressive gendered ideas. The position of sex educator and the perpetuation of anti-Blackness in curriculums and dominant cultural narratives of sexuality and gender provides foundation for the analysis presented throughout the findings chapters that follow. As an overarching goal of this research is consciousness raising and a call for critical sexuality training in counselor education, experiences of insufficient sex education in primary and secondary schooling is relevant in analyzing the discourse of adult relationships and sexuality that follows in Chapter 5 and 6.

This chapter begins with narratives of insufficient sex ed, gendered messages which support male supremacy, and the paradox of the culture of silence. These narratives are strictly binary in gender and prioritize heterosexuality including

monogamous legal marriage to the exclusion and erasure of any other gender, sexuality and relationship structure. Additionally, there is no mention of disability within the explicit sex education discourse of sex education which reinforces the erasure of disabled sexuality.

Insufficient Sex Ed

The podcast *Death, Sex and Money* dedicated the month of January in 2019 to episodes that explored Sex (Mis)Education (Sal, 2019a; Sal, 2019b). The episode "Sex Ed Fails" is a compilation of callers describing their own experience with sex education (Sal, 2019b). The experiences ranged from a complete lack of education and abstinence-only curriculums to explicit misinformation, fear-based curriculums, and deep personal shaming.

> Yeah, no actual information and just a lot of shaming and scare tactics (Sal, 2019b)

> Any other subject no one would stand for teaching kids – I don't know – that like the earth is flat or pi is exactly three or something like that. It's wild how bad my sex education was (Sal, 2019b)

The use of shaming and scare tactics replaces any actual information or education. One caller raises the question of why we as a collective culture allow such tactics in education of a topic that infiltrates our entire lifespan, future relationships, and wellbeing. The analysis of this research provides some direction for the answer to this question, as will be illustrated throughout Chapters 5 and 6 of findings and Chapter 7 of discussion.

In the *American Sex* episode "Sex ed and social justice in the south," the hosts interview Alex (professionally known as @sexologybae) who identifies herself as a

Black cisgender woman, sex educator and activist from the South (Megatron & Melvoin-Berg, 2019). Alex explains her experience of sex education while growing up:

> I didn't have sex education, like nothing, you know, like nothing. So let's start there… and that's obviously a very common thing across the south, and across the country, only 24 states mandate sex education and obviously from there falls down to the states on what they want to include in that curriculum. And so obviously in states that are more conservative, if they do have sex that at all it's going to be abstinence based. And based around you know, more like religious dogma, great lack of a better word (Megatron & Melvoin-Berg, 2019)

Alex speaks to the differences in state mandates for sex education, which lends to disparities across the country. As reported in Chapter 2, only 13 of the 24 states require the information presented in sex education to be medically accurate. Often, sex education in secondary school, particularly when abstinence-based, has been isolated to a short module in a health class with primary messages of avoiding pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) previously called sexually transmitted diseases (STDs):

> [the teacher] always told us things like, Oh, don't kiss boys because then you're going to get pregnant (Sal, 2019b)

> all that was really in there was different pictures of genitals with different STDs and basically the messaging was, don't have sex because you're either going to end up with a baby or this is going to happen to you (Megatron & Melvoin-Berg, 2019)

A common scare tactic used over the past several decades has been pictures of genitals with untreated highly progressed STIs. Research has long indicated that these tactics are

not effective in preventing sexual behavior or increasing the use of protection. In fact,

because these images are extremely progressed examples of untreated infections and

provide a false sense of knowledge that STIs are visible to the naked eye, and therefore

the absence of such visible infection means the sexual encounter will be "safe."

Additionally, this impacted the likelihood of people getting tested unless they had a

visible symptom. This is false information with very real consequences, especially for

young people:

> We didn't learn anything other than if you engage in sex. You know, you're going
>
> to contract a disease and your parts are going to fall off (Sal, 2019b)
>
> If you're ever with somebody and you're not sure if they might have an STD like
>
> you can even use two condoms (Sal, 2019b)
>
> And obviously, that's, that's obviously sex-negative, that doesn't give anybody any
>
> clue as to what to do with, you know, like, you're not stopping teens from wanting
>
> to have sex or stopping teens from having sex. You're just making it harder for
>
> them to access information that can keep them safe (Megatron & Melvoin-Berg,
>
> 2019)

Providing false information and scare tactics does indeed make it harder for young people

to access any information to keep them safe, which is the presumed goal of such abstinent

based agendas. There is rarely an explicit mention of pleasure, however, an underlying

message in the scare tactics is often for cisgender men to protect their experiences of

pleasure:

> That you had a limited number of orgasms in life (Sal, 2019b).

Discussion of orgasm is often conflated with pleasure, positioning an orgasm is the ultimate goal and the only source of and measurement of pleasure. However, orgasm outside of the cisgender male experience is rarely even mentioned. The resulting explicit messages that are reported by cismen is to protect themselves and their pleasure (orgasms). These reports also include misinformation and fear of losing body parts which results in the implicit message to protect oneself from an external harm or the "other." The implied other in heteronormative perspective is "woman" – specifically cisgender women. Additionally, protecting the cis male orgasm also implies that pleasure is an assumed part of the cis male experience.

When sex education is limited to the sex-negative focus of abstinence only or disease and pregnancy prevention, the messages are deeply entrenched in binary gendered ideas and the assumption of heterosexuality. Therefore, this level of insufficient sex education can function as an additional vehicle to maintain and perpetuate indoctrination to oppressive dominant cultural narratives of binary genders, and ultimately, white supremacy culture and the wheel of domination as illustrated in the literature presented in Chapter 2. The following section of implicit lessons will outline the messages in cis/heteronormativity that are communicated through binary gendered narratives. Interrogating the paradox of a culture of silence reveals the very loud and clear messages of cis male superiority and ownership of sexual pleasure, and the narrative themes of slut shaming, rape culture and sexual abuse that are present in the discursive data of this research.

Implicit Lessons in Binary Gendered Narratives

The experience of sex education having segregated lessons based on binary genders is common. Messages and scare tactics presented above are presented in binary gendered

messages which place implicit focus on cis male sexuality through the apparent erasure

of cisfemale agency:

> What I don't feel like I got taught in sex ed is that women have sexuality (Sal,
>
> 2019b)

This apparent erasure of women's sexuality and the passive position of women in the

heteronormative matrix is consistent with the research and speaks to the larger cultural

norm of centering and isolating the heterosexual cis men's experience that will be

explored throughout the finding chapters. The "erasure" of female sexuality in sex

education is countered by the messages that female sexuality is constructed through the

male gaze of desire. One of the resulting lessons for cis women is that of confusion and

deep shame that is reinforced at a young age and throughout development. The

description of a common lesson activity is transcribed below:

> The teacher had all the girls in one room, she got us a Butterfinger [candy bar], and
>
> she gave it to the first girl. And she said, I want you to just rip open the top of this
>
> and pass it to the girl behind you. This really happened. And by the time it got to
>
> the end of the row, we had bitten, licked, eaten after each other. And the lesson
>
> was, I can't believe this,
>
> The lesson was that every time you have *sex with someone that is not your*
>
> *husband*, you essentially are the Butterfinger who's *becoming more and more*
>
> *unwanted* (emphasis mine) (Sal, 2019b).

The assumption of heterosexuality, marriage as the ultimate goal, and the male gaze of

desire are backgrounded in this lesson of cisfemale virginity or purity as the measure of

(and only source of) her worth. The position of the future "husband" holds the external

power of providing worth to the Butterfinger that has been "passed around" (passive- no

agency- loss of power) and is now dirty, "becoming more and more unwanted" which

seems to also imply that it was not very wanted in the beginning and has just become

"more and more so" through its experiences (Sal, 2019b).

These backgrounded messages of who has worth and value is further explored

below in the paradox of the culture of silence and themes of slut shaming and rape

culture. The constructs of virginity and purity directly tied to self-worth are explicitly

present in this discourse through the experience of religion as the primary source for sex

education and the presence of purity ceremonies which will be explored in the upcoming

section "purity at all costs".

The Paradox of the Culture of 'Silence' and the Absence of Consent

In almost every episode sampled for this research there was mention of the

dominant cultural messaging received while growing up is "don't talk about sex". This

message carries over into adulthood, manifesting in ways that have deep impact on

relationships with partners, and with oneself, particularly as it relates to an ability to

consent in and outside of sexual situations. These themes which are introduced here and

further explored in Chapter 5 and 6. A few examples of the dominant cultural message of

silence from different episodes are below:

> In Western societies, we have so much sexual repression built into us from an early
>
> age whether you know, it's   from our parents or those around us and culture, and it
>
> feels dangerous and scary to talk about sex even with your most intimate partner
>
> (Kosterlitz & Kosterlitz, 2019b)

Especially with things like this that come from family background, right? Like, as

your brain was developing. This was the stuff that you were bathed in. So of course,

it has more of a heart pull or more of a gut pull than what you know, to be the truth

for you (Connell & Botsford, 2019a)

These quotes illustrate the impact of messages throughout childhood have lasting impact

on development into adulthood, extending fear and shame into relationships with

ourselves and intimate partners.

Dr. Emily Morse is the host of the podcast *Sex with Emily* (Morse, 2019). In the

episode Porn PSA, Dr. Morse reflects on her own journey in feeling inexperienced or

unequipped at negotiating her sexual needs in relationships and the impact on her ability

to advocate for her needs in relationships:

But I think I've been that girl [where] for so long, I didn't say anything. Because I

was like, Oh, this is how it's supposed to go. He knows. He knows what he's

doing. Men know more than I do. I'm just gonna let him do this. So for every

woman out there who's like this is familiar. It's okay to be like, you know what?

I'm not ready yet. Not quite turned on yet. Not ready for the pounding. [I need] a

little bit [of] warm up. its ok to say that (Morse, 2019)

In this segment Dr. Morse is communicating the experience of a sexual encounter not

being pleasurable, but as a cisgender woman in a heterosexual context, she thinks "this is

how it's supposed to go" (Morse 2019). In other words, she is not supposed to be

enjoying this, there must be something wrong with her that "he" is enjoying it but "she"

is not. The expectation that "men know more than I do" is a result of erasure of women's

sexual agency and a reflection of the self-doubt and mistrust that grow out of a sex-

negative culture with a lack of comprehensive sex education. This, in part, defines rape culture.

Rape culture is the concept in which rape is normalized and pervasive due to the sociocultural attitudes around sexuality and gender. The experience that Dr. Morse reflects upon illustrates an assumption of rape culture, in that the cisgender woman is the object, not subject of the sexual encounter. The internalized experience of this objectification creates confusion and possibly "consent" to experiences that are not pleasurable. While a full examination of rape culture and sexual assault is outside the scope of this research, the following sections highlight an introduction to these connections as was present in the analyzed discourse of the podcasts, including sexual assault and slut shaming.

Rape Culture and Sexual Assault

A cultural silence around sexuality allows for misinformation to keep power and remain invisible. One of the more explicit and dangerous messages is that of gendered ideas around rape and rape myths. In the episode "Sex Ed Fails" (Sal, 2019b), several callers mention misinformation they received about sexual assault and rape:

I was never taught that rape could be by a partner (Sal, 2019b)

I was never taught that men can get sexually assaulted (Sal, 2019b)

I also thought that you couldn't have an erection without giving consent (Sal, 2019b)

Cis/heteronormativity centers the experience of heterosexual, white, nondisabled, cisgender man. However, because it functions to maintain systems of white supremacy and capitalism, even the cisgender white man is victim to [some of] its consequences. In

the example above, it is the myth that men are not victims of abuse or rape. The idea that there wouldn't be an erection without giving consent is not only confusing and damaging for a person with a penis who finds themselves having the physiological response of an erection during abuse, it is also dangerous to any partner who believes they must have already given their consent if their partner has an erection.

In the episode of *Secret Lives of Black Women* titled "Sex and Power," the hosts Charla and Lauren welcome guest Numa Perrier to discuss her movie that centers Black femme sexuality (Lauriston & Domino, 2019). They discuss their own experiences growing up with a lack of sex education and open discussion about sexuality:

> Lauren (co-host): You never had, like a sex talk with your parents or with your older siblings?

> Numa (guest): Not beyond being told not to do it. Yeah, no. And actually, in my family, there was sexual abuse in my family that was not talked about until my adopted father passed away, that's, that's still something that we're dealing with years ago. That's something that we're still processing, especially since he's, we can't punish him. He's dead. (Lauriston & Domino, 2019)

For Numa, sex or sexuality was a topic that was off-limits. When sex and sexuality are off limits, so becomes anything that is sexuality adjacent, including sexual abuse. When we are silenced in regard to our bodies and pleasure, we are also silenced and confused when our bodies become violated.

This is an example of an explicit mention of childhood sexual abuse. A deep exploration and discussion of childhood sexual abuse, rape, and assault is beyond the scope of this work. However, the limiting gendered ideas and heteronorms that are

pervasive throughout the experiences reported in these episodes absolutely contribute to

the silencing of survivors of abuse and our expectations of self and others in consensual

sexual relationships. Additionally, this echoes back to Foucault the deployment of

"children" as discussed in Chapter 2; the narrative of "for the protection of children" does

not actually function to protect children.

These sex-negative cultural messages are often reinforced through parenting and

the 'silence' around sexuality discourse in the home. Ironically, the goal of protecting a

child through such silence often results in a lack of ability to identify danger by

perpetuating the absence of consent and lack of sexual agency as a norm. The hosts of the

podcast *Secret Lives of Black Women* discuss this relationship to parenting, and the

ability to break this cycle of shame and silence around women's sexuality, particularly

Black women's sexuality with their guest Numa:

> Charla (co-host): Yeah, but that I love that you're super conscious about that [as a
> parent] because that's one thing that I really think that my parents missed out on
> was giving me the sense of agency. Like that's what they take away from you
> when they give you shame instead. When they take information away from you,
> they take away your sense of control of your own body
>
> Numa (guest): And they're doing it for protection, you know, they definitely think
> that that's the key element – they want to protect you. But I think that it ends up
> not protecting because then we kind of don't know what to do with ourselves. We
> don't know how to talk about it. When something happens that we don't didn't
> want to happen. We feel ashamed. We don't know how to bring that up

Charla (co-host): I later would be in situations where I didn't know how to say no, and nothing ever happened to me. But I didn't know how to say, I didn't know how to be vocal about what I wanted. And I had like, pleasure was for the man and not for me. And so I didn't know how to be like, No, I don't want that I want this or No, I don't want this at all. As a matter of fact, I don't even want you here.

Lauren (co-host): Yeah, but you're also like teaching her to be you know, sure of herself and who she is as a whole person, which I think is a lot of things are parents trying to box us in? Yeah. And you in that boxing in, you lose the ability to sort of like trust your gut instinct. Yeah, like, what feels good or trying to like, if you're trying to please people all the time. You don't know.

There is a sense of sadness that Charla and Lauren convey as they reflect on the ways in which their own parents fell short in providing them with guidance that, though rooted in a place of protection, ultimately left them unempowered and lacking personal agency. I sense that part of the sadness is about the relationship with their parents as well; sadness for their parents feeling this was the only or best choice, and sadness for the ways this could have manifested in a fractured relationship between parent and child. The desire to "protect" implies there is a threat, and that the threat presumably comes from sex itself. The assumption of cis/heteronormativity through which our culture functions, means the parents are presumably trying to protect them from men. However, I would argue that the real threat these parents felt is the knowledge of systemic oppressions, particularly for this group of women, the consequences of systemic racism and its intersection with gender. As they have stated above, the result of not being able to better identify where the

threat is coming from, results in being stripped of the power and agency that would go much further in service of protecting oneself from dangers in the world.

Charla clearly identifies being *given* shame, and shame has a high cost. Shame takes up space and erodes the possibility for trust in oneself, in one's body and doesn't equip them with the ability to protect themselves at all. They identify self-blame when "something goes wrong," and are left without any sense of control over their bodies or experiences. Ultimately, these segments illustrate what so many people (particularly women) know; the overall experience of being disconnected from their bodies and pleasure has implications that reach far outside the realm of sexual relationships and erodes the relationship with self and with others, including parents, family, and friends.

In connecting their experiences of movies serving as the source of their sex education, the women of the podcast *Secret Lives of Black Women* discuss the complexities of consent and being curious about one's own sexuality in a culture where they are not given permission to do so (Lauriston & Domino, 2019). As background, the movie *Poetic Justice* is about a cisgender heterosexual Black man and Black woman who eventually have sex in the back of his mail truck:

> Lauren (co-host): movies [were big] for me – because it's like that's where I got
>
> my education – like I remember being young and with my older cousins sneaking
>
> and watching Poetic Justice, you know and being like, I want Tupac to pop me in
>
> the back of a mail truck! But hearing that curiosity and the like the naughtiness of
>
> it. But then definitely being like that's wrong and yeah, like leaning into that…but
>
> it's not wrong, it's curious, and whenever we as women embrace our sexuality
>
> there was a lot of like timidness. Yeah, I've been like 'meek and I want it, but I

don't,' you know? So to see something and be like no, this is a choice that I'm

making is really...[different to see]

Numa (guest): It's that avenue of you know, that gives a justification like if you're

timid about it, but you do it anyway. *You can kind of justify that you did it*

because you know, it's kind of this like, the politics of pleasure. you know, we're

not we're not given permission to enjoy things that are [sexual]…

Charla (co-host): We're not given permission to be sexual or to want sex. We still

have to protect that flower. Yeah, some reason and it like *you still have to have an*

alibi for why you wanted to get fucked by a thug in the back of a mail van.

Lauren (co-host): I know.

Numa (guest): Yeah, I think it's definitely part of it. And again, I think it goes

back to the whole justification, like, you know, if you're timid about it, then it

makes it. Okay. That you got convinced. (Lauriston & Domino, 2019; emphasis

mine)

Protecting the "flower" of virginity means never admitting that as a woman, you have

your own sexual desire or needs. In order to protect themselves, a woman needs to "be

timid" and "be convinced" by a male partner and have an "alibi" ready to prove her

innocence, that she held out enough to be a respectful woman. These women are having

this conversation in 2019 and can explicitly name this process and talk about it; however,

this has not always been the case. Historically the concept of a woman "needing to be

convinced" to have sex with a man has contributed to rape culture, particularly through

the mechanism of slut shaming.

Slut Shaming

Slut shaming is a particularly gendered concept. It occurs any time a person transgresses against the accepted code of sexual conduct, or steps outside of the prescribed behaviors and roles that are permitted under the cisgender heteronormative script. Slut shaming is one example of the weaponizing of a sexual experience in retaliation of something, such as a breakup.

In the episode of *Death, Sex and Money* titled "I Wanted to Be a Good Girl," guest Andrea (Sal, 2019a) recounts an emotional experience of having a sexual relationship with a high school boyfriend where she felt unequipped to negotiate what she wanted to consent to versus what she did not want to do. She does describe the experience itself as violating; however, while back at school and hearing the rumors of her hookup spread, she recalls the violation of privacy and shame that came with being labeled a "slut." The rumors had come directly from the boy she was with, yet he was not branded with guilt or shame for having engaged in the behaviors. The inability to be able to negotiate sex as a woman has put many people in dangerous situations, particularly young people.

The following sections build upon the experiences of the gendered nature of sex education and messages of self-worth, which are connected to religious experiences but extend beyond the religious community narratives. The data then presents these binary gender narratives as they are connected to historical roots in slavery and then the current day manifestations of anti-Blackness embedded in the actual role of "Sex Educator."

Purity at All Costs

The value of purity was explicitly discussed as having an impact on the personal development of several individuals across the podcast episodes. For several cis women in

this data, the value of purity was especially central in their religious upbringing and

strongly tied to feelings of self-worth into adulthood (Megatron & Melvoin-Berg, 2019,

Sal, 2019a, Sal, 2019b). The discussion of purity ceremonies was present in several

episodes and warrants documentation and description.

In the *American Sex* episode, Alex describes the purity ceremonies and explains

how attending such ceremonies was a common occurrence in her upbringing:

So, again, my family's incredibly religious, and by extension, as a woman

growing up in that environment, I was raised to basically value purity over

everything else and remaining pure over everything else. So the purity ceremony,

basically what would happen was that all of the young women in the church were

supposed to basically come down the aisle like it was a wedding everybody was

wearing white […] these 12 and 13 year old girls are walking down the aisle in

like the kind of wedding garb […] So the whole point of the ceremony was to

like, reclaim yourself before God, like, basically, if you had already had sex you

would like re-virginize yourself. (Megatron & Melvoin-Berg, 2019)

The creation of a public "wedding to god" and commitment to being "pure" reinforces

marriage as an ultimate goal or high honor, and the need for women to be "worthy" of

such an honor. In addition, this directly connects marriage to spirituality, and elevates the

stakes of purity and marriage being tied to the salvation of a person's soul. Implicit in

this message and ritual is the role of the young cis woman to literally embody purity with

a purpose of protecting cis men from impurity and ultimately to provide/gift/save the cis

woman purity to the cis man. The purity is valued above all else, but not for the benefit of

the cis woman except in that she can then be worthy of a husband. This message is deeply

internalized and rendered invisible as part of the foundational assumptions that are

carried in connection to relationships and sexuality, having lifelong impact on a young

person's ideas about self-worth and being in relationship with others.

Alex states:

> when it came time to begin unpacking my relationship with sexuality and shame
>
> and stigma, a lot of it was tied back to this 'mythical purity' that I had basically
>
> been taught to hold on to for dear life (Megatron & Melvoin-Berg, 2019).

Concepts of purity are connected to virginity which signifies the self-worth of a cisgender

female, deeply impacting her relationship with sexuality. Often this can impact life well

into adulthood. The podcast episode introduced below was dedicated to the struggle with

self-worth and wanting to be considered "good."

The "Good Girl" Dichotomy

The *Death, Sex and Money* episode titled "I Wanted to Be a Good Girl" was

dedicated to one heterosexual cisgender woman's experience of early sex education that

had lasting impacts on her into adulthood. The larger content of this episode includes

discussion of her relationships with cisgender men (suggesting she identifies as

heterosexual but not explicitly named), and the absence of identification or reference to

race suggests she is white. There is no mention of disability status and pronouns are not

stated but she/her is used throughout the interview. For Andrea, purity was taught in both

abstaining from sex until marriage and in sexual purity of thought. For her, purity

ceremonies were also common:

> I think in the messaging is always that girls should behave themselves in a certain
>
> way. You know, don't be alone with a boy don't dress in ways that might cause

> him to stumble…We're responsible for making sure that they don't have impure
>
> thoughts (Sal, 2019a)

The task of the cis woman being responsible for the cis man's salvation has deep

consequences. The binary horizontal category of man//woman (assumed to be cisgender)

becomes a binary of pure//impure, clean//dirty, good//bad, pride//disappointment; thus

Men as priority//Women as service. Andrea expressed her confusion as she reflected on

conflicting feelings over the course of adolescence, and the changes in her body brought

on by puberty. The host asked if she had a sincere commitment to the lessons she was

taught:

> I think I wanted to have a sincere commitment to those ideas because I wanted, I
>
> wanted to be a good girl. I didn't want to disappoint my parents, but I felt torn
>
> because as I got older and started dating and having sexual feelings. I mean, those
>
> things feel good. You know? And I didn't want to deny that. But at the same time,
>
> I'm a rule follower. I've always been that. Like, I couldn't allow myself to feel those
>
> things (Sal, 2019a)

Faced with conflicting feelings and confusion around experiencing pleasure, the desire to

"be good" and remain connected to her parents by not disappointing them creates an

impossible choice – to be "good" and have any "worth," you must deny messages of

desire from your body. Andrea feels the only option is to deny her feelings and

connection to her body and desires. This impossible choice is accompanied implications

far beyond sexual desire. With no script of how to manage the conflict, Andrea highlights

the way this is manifested into a lack of ability to say "no" which ironically is the goal of

these lessons:

I think I just tried to shut it out. Mostly. The person that I was with at that age was

also pressuring me a lot and I didn't know how to, I didn't know how to say no.

You're not given the resources, like, you're given the message that your body is a

temple and your virginity is sacred. And without it, you're nothing. But like, you

know, I remember being with this guy when I was that age and wanting to do some

of it, and not wanting to do some of it, but feeling really pressured and not knowing

how to say no (Sal, 2019a)

This complete objectification of the woman creates a double bind of irreconcilable

demands. The host points out:

That's interesting. Because what you've learned how to do is to try to do what

people are asking of you (Sal, 2019a)

Learning to "follow the rules" in the hierarchal system that Andrea was taught left her

unable to negotiate and advocate for her needs in relationships. The disempowerment of

herself that comes from the message of "you are nothing" is therefore transferred into

peer relationships. Doing what you are told is tied to being good, which can be easily

confused.

Another narrative of experiences similar to Andrea's is provided below. For Laci

Green, a white, cisgender woman interviewed in the podcast Ear Biscuits, growing up in

a religious community and participating in purity ceremonies highlighted sexism and

caused conflict and distance in the relationships with her parents:

Basically, what I was picking up on was a lot of sexism in the church. And I didn't

have the words for it at that time. And my parents didn't really either. So it was like

a lot of fighting and clashing [with my parents] (McLaughlin & Neal, 2015)

While sexism is clearly very present in these ceremonies as well as the previous evidence

of presented, the oppressive structures at work are much more complicated and

intersectional than a simple cis male/cis female hierarchy. While the micro level

interpretation for a white woman may be that of over simplified sexism, in the United

States these concepts are directly tied to colonization, capitalism and supremacy.

As illustrated in Chapter 2, dominant cultural narratives about what it means to be a

"woman" are deeply intertwined with white supremacy and racial hierarchies. The

following section presents discourse which explores the racial roots of 'purity' and the

chapter concludes with content on the role of the sex educator and whiteness infused

within sex ed spaces. It is important to note that the narratives given by white women in

this data do not include an implicit or explicit understanding of this larger structural

analysis.

Racial Roots of "Purity"

The oppressive value of purity and the good girl theme are not constrained to a

religious upbringing, though as illustrated in Chapter 2 its roots are deeply tied to

Christianity and capitalism. The oppressive 19th century term "True Womanhood" and its

direct connection to racism and capitalism was introduced into this analysis by Alex

(@sexologybae) in the *American Sex* episode "Sex ed and social justice in the south"

with hosts Sunny Megatron and Ken Melvoin-Berg:

> the construction of 'true womanhood' that started during slavery, that it basically
>
> excluded black women from being considered women. You know, we were
>
> basically regarded as animals. That wasn't just slave masters, you know,
>
> perpetuating that system. Their wives were just as violent towards enslaved
>
> people towards the children, that were a result of rape, that were also enslaved.

>Like, because those systems benefited them [white women], they were able to
>
>have access to a, you know, financially secure life. They're able to be society
>
>women, they were able to, you know, access, the level of privilege that was really
>
>rooted in the exclusion of other people. […] But the construction of true
>
>womanhood that white women have, we still see it today. And that I mean, like
>
>that's where it's rooted in. And I know white women reckon with that history.
>
>(Megatron & Melvoin-Berg, 2019)

It is imperative to expand on this concept of "true womanhood" to develop an understanding of this its structural role in the mis/education of women and its contributions to racial hierarchies. The core tenants of purity, piety and submission that were explicitly tied to the worth of white womanhood was a social construct that was necessary to soothe the concerns of Christian men who were now called to work in a newly industrial society and to further capitalism through labor. With the "right" or "true" woman at home to maintain the religious values and moral obligations, he was free to provide the labor that was needed to grow the economy. While the virtues of purity, piety, and submission defined the worth and character of the "true" white woman, these virtues were not afforded to Black women, and in fact a white woman's worth was drastically strengthened by its use as a way to distinguish white women from Black women. The deliberate and intentional placement of white women at the top of the racial hierarchy of worthiness automatically implies the placement women and nonbinary folks of all other racial and ethnic identities beneath them. Racism is baked into dominant cultural narrative and cis/heteronormative understanding of femininity and self-worth by virtue of purity (virgin) piety and submission. The white women's proximity to power

and position of gender oppression is evidenced throughout the finding chapters. These concepts are explored throughout the Chapters 5 and 6, further discussed in Chapter 7, and beginning in the upcoming section.

The Role of the Sex Educator

Many of the guests who are interviewed in the episodes sampled explicitly state the lack of their own sex education as a motivating factor for their decision to become educated and help educate others. For some people, the lack of comprehensive sex education creates an opportunity to step up to fill the empty role of sex educator. Upon reflecting on their own lack of sex education and the process of overcoming inaccurate and fear-based teachings, there is a theme of moving into sex education as a career or specialty to fill the need that was not met in their own life.

One major risk to having this void of information and education across the lifespan, is that it can be filled by any willing person. In the sample of episodes for this research there were several examples of hosts and guests claiming positions of authority without providing information without any clarification about training or education or unlearning as it related to sexuality. In the episode of *Trauma Queen* titled "Decolonizing Sex Ed," Ericka Hart identifies this as a common occurrence in the field:

> I feel like 'sex educator' is a very easy identity to kind of slap on. It's a very easy career that people can have. Because there is no mandate of this is what you have to do to become a sex educator. All you have to do for the people who are not sex educators or people who don't talk about sex or don't go follow this career is someone that likes to talk about sex (Eborn, 2019)

The sole qualification of "someone who like to talk about sex" is a reflection of the dominant cultural "silence" or taboo in directly talking about sex. There were several

examples of this in the podcasts where there is a lack of clarity on the actual training and

competency of the "expert guest" or the host. The following examples illustrate how

moving into a position of authority and sex education or coaching is not uncommon:

> it's not an obvious path from where I started. Because my, my career before was in
>
> tech. And now I work with couples around sexuality (Kosterlitz & Kosterlitz,
>
> 2019c)

> you're having all these new feelings and these experiences, and I felt very ill
>
> equipped to handle it all. And so it became an interest of mine. You know, I just
>
> kind of learned everything that I could absorbed everything that I could about
>
> sexuality and gender and all these issues that were affecting me. And I thought,
>
> Hey, there are probably other people out there who feel the same way as I do, right.
>
> They don't have the answers. They don't have anyone to talk to let's start a
>
> community here. And that's when I sort of shifted gears. And I was doing a lot of
>
> sex ed stuff on my college campus when I went to Berkeley around that time. So it
>
> all kind of fit together for me (McLaughlin & Neal, 2015)

Moving into a position of authority and sex education simply because it is a personal

interest and one feels "ill-equipped" is not uncommon. However, in the absence of any

mandates or regulations for competency, simply being interested in sex education, doing

some Google searches and then positioning oneself as authority, perpetuates the

mis/education of others. However, it is not just anyone who can claim to be an authority

on a topic they are not trained or educated in, this ability is a function of a privileged

position, and all too often, the specific position of being a cis/heteronormative white

woman.

Whiteness Infused in Sex Education

        The position of privilege that allows an individual to consider moving into a position of authority on a topic about which they are not well informed, is a hallmark of whiteness particularly for white women. Historically the settler colonizing mindset that says all others are less than and if there is a gap in information, why look to those who are "less than?" In other words, "there can't possibly be information out there that I (the white person) don't already know or have access to." The topic of whiteness as a structure being infused in sex education is explored in the following section and further illustrated in the case example that follows.

        Understandably, the possibility of "just anyone" stepping into the role of expert is something that any field of study or profession should be concerned about. Sunny Megatron and Ken Melvoin-Berg are two highly knowledgeable sex education professionals and hosts of the podcast *American Sex*. While discussing the motivations for people to step into the sex educator role, they bring issues of class into the analysis by noting that further evidence this role is undervalued is evidenced by the lack of compensation available or offered for their services. Therefore, this could speak to who can *afford* to choose this role. In the United States our class system is deeply tied to race, and the "wheel of domination" presented in Chapter 2 (Mayra, 2020). The naming of sex educator spaces as being predominately white was present in multiple episodes of this research:

        Alex (sexologybae): most of the people that are educators or writers or bloggers are

        generally… white and from the north, and women and so, seeing them talk about

their sexuality backgrounds, it looks so much different from mine (Megatron &

Melvoin-Berg, 2019)

Ericka Hart: it's challenging. And it's challenging because most of the people who

have access to sex and sex ed spaces are white (Eborn, 2019)

In the first quote above, Alex @sexologybae notes that the predominantly white nature of

the educators and bloggers reflects experiences that are very different from her own. This

lack of representation is part of the broader problem reflected in the research in sex

education. Research summarized in Chapter 2 illustrates that traditional/historical sex

education has been disproportionately damaging to groups that are already historically

marginalized, through either a lack of representation or the presence of negative

representation in the curriculum, or both. The overrepresentation of white women in sex

education spaces is not reflective as an identity label of the decades of work and research

in sexuality that has been most influential and powerful in the field. Specifically, Black

feminist scholars have been writing about these intersections for decades, and yet, white

sex ed spaces, and educational spaces in general, often omit such knowledge and

analysis. Ericka Hart illustrates the underlying assumptions at play and their experience

as a Black professor with white students:

White people have conditioned to not believe Black people. And to think that Black

people are stupid and to think that our only worth is in sports …And to they

absolutely do not believe that Black femme presented people are Black femmes

have anything of value to say and that anything that we're saying is actually just

supposed to be our pain displayed for them. And that's it. And I have found that

because I'm not doing that there is a lot of resistance to what I'm saying (Eborn,

2019)

In the above quotes Hart is speaking to the general and pervasive lack of respect and

value of Black femme presented people who are seen as "legitimate" only when the pain

of their experience is the topic at hand.

Often whiteness is the only qualification needed for legitimacy. As discussed in

Chapter 1 and 2, the concept and legitimacy of whiteness is weighed against the anti-

Blackness that is embedded in the power dynamics of dominant culture. The educational

systems that exist function to help indoctrinate every citizen to this dogma through its

curriculum, a plight that sex education is not immune to:

Ericka Hart: And it happens institutionally… even the programs that I work for that

I got to go through and call myself a sex educator, didn't train me to actually deal

with my own internalized anti-Blackness or the anti-blackness within already

embedded in the curriculum. So I had to do that work, but I cannot imagine the

other people doing that work [being a sex educator] and not [doing that internal

work]. How does that make sense? (Eborn, 2019)

Anti-Blackness is embedded in everything about dominant cultural narratives and norms.

As Hart implies, dismantling the messages of anti-Blackness that have been internalized

requires intentional and deeply personal reflective work. The need for ongoing self-

reflection specific to systems of oppression is a theme that will be explored further in

Chapter 6 of the findings. When there is no opportunity or commitment to doing such

work, there are consequences that include the replication of systems of oppression.

Conversely, without an understanding of oppressive normativity as directly connected to

anti-Blackness, such reflection is insufficient and incomplete. This includes counselors

and illustrates the need for critical sexuality studies in counselor education and training.

The hosts of the podcast *Queer Sex Ed* speak directly to the racism and oppression

embedded in dominant cultural understanding of sex and gender in their introduction of

episode "Q and A 3" (Connell & Botsford, 2019a). The hosts frame the issue of white

supremacy culture and identify the invisible structures that are at play:

Jay: we need to be naming white supremacy in all of these [conversations] because

it infuses everything in sexual health, in relationships, in the way that we think

about and structure our lives. So the reason that I bring this up is to be clear for our

new listeners, and to all of you who've been listening for a while:

Sexual health and reproductive justice must operate and strive to be in solidarity

with larger social movements that are addressing racism and white supremacy,

sexism and misogyny, anti queer and anti-trans antagonism, classism, and other

oppressive structures in society, we can't get to a place of sex justice or

reproductive justice, if any of these other things exist (Connell & Botsford, 2019a)

It cannot be said enough that systems of oppression, and the "wheel of domination"

presented in Chapter 2 inform everything we think about when we think about

relationships, and they infuse how we literally structure our lives. The naming of these

underlying systems of oppression is a vital step in disrupting oppression. To illustrate the

point that these structures are infused in everything, the hosts of *Queer Sex Ed* use the

example of birth control and the concept or debate of 'choice':

Sara: the language of freedom of choice [as example:] around birth control...is

pretty inherently classist and racist because what it really centers around is who

has the freedom to make those choices and who is economically privileged

enough to make those choices.

And so when we talk about things like the history of suffrage in the United States

for white women, that's also the history of racism, and it's also the history of birth

control. And how do we deal with the fact that a lot of these big figures were also

white supremacists using racist tropes about birth and animalistic ideas of people

of color to justify their campaign, both for women's suffrage, but also for birth

control? You can't.

You can't address that without talking about racism without talking about white

supremacy without talking about how whiteness gets infused into all of these

spaces. And that's just like one tiny example (Connell & Botsford, 2019a)

This concept of choice was introduced and discussed in Chapter 2 as a mechanism of

control under capitalism. The example of choice and birth control is one of countless

narratives whose roots of white supremacy have been lost in current day basic

understandings. The dominant cultural discourse of "choice" occurs outside a structural

analysis and the context of class, race, and ability. The scope of this research is not to

provide an exhaustive list of these examples, but instead to illuminate the instances and

examples that are present in the data sampled to illustrate the ubiquitous nature of anti-

Blackness and cis/heteronorms at the discursive level. The way in which

cis/heteronormativity and white supremacy culture has controlled our understanding of

history and its current day implications. Ericka Hart sums up their concern as a Black sex

educator and professor:

So I get wary of folks when they're like, I'm a sex educator and I don't know their

pedagogy. I don't know their background. I don't know what works they study, I

don't know who informs their work. All I know is that they like to say penis and

vulva and they're not afraid of that. And I find that people are getting hired just on

those things. The fact that they may know where babies come from, or how

ovulation works or they care a lot about abortion and birth control, but I don't get an

intersectional pedagogy breakdown that's anti-racist. That's, you know, anti-

capitalist that's not elitist. I don't see that, so I get weary about that (Eborn, 2019)

Hart's wariness of sex educators whose sole qualifications are a lack of discomfort in

saying "penis" or "vulva" coupled with knowledge of ovulation or reproduction, is

extremely warranted and supported in the existing research. The result of a lack of

transparency about background and qualification has serious implications on the health

and wellbeing of the general population, but disproportionately impacts already

marginalized groups. Because the dominant culture narrative is rooted in settler

colonialism, capitalism and white supremacy, the absence of an intersectional pedagogy

and explicit position of anti-racism will more often than not result in a replication of

these systems of oppression, especially in relation to concepts and discourse of sexuality

and gender. The denial or omission of these structural contexts functions to maintain their

power. Hart's statement of concern also reflects the underlying motivations for this

research.

The following case example illustrates the story of one such white woman who

took it upon herself to fill the role of sex educator.

Laci Green: A Case Example in Mediocracy and White Women Privilege

As reflected in dominant cultural norms, a privileged position, often uninformed and always unearned, carries opportunity. In the field of sex education, opportunity can be for exposure to spread and share ideas, and ultimately is attached to opportunity for gained capital. In other words, discursive and economic power. In the *Trauma Queen* episode of "Decolonizing Sex Ed" Ericka Hart presents the case example of Laci Green:

> So I think about someone like Laci Green, right? And Laci Green was so popular.
> And I always was so confused. Why is she so popular? Why do people like her so
> much? You know, all she had in her background was like she took a sex ed class in
> college or something she said, or she has some sort of obscure degree, but no one
> really knew what it was. And then sure enough, she started being transphobic, she
> started being racist. She started being sexist, lots of different things, a biological
> essentialist. All of this shit came out. And I was so frustrated because I was like,
> why did anybody believe what she was saying in the first place? And I find that
> that's a big issue in the sex ed world (Eborn, 2019)

Hart uses the example of Laci Green to illustrate the fact that a cisgender white woman with no evidence to support their claim to expertise can still become well-known and successful in the field. Quite often, these "experts" are later exposed to be extremely harmful in replicating and perpetuating systems of oppression such as transmisogyny, racism and ableism, all of which are part of cis/heteronormativity. In addition, it was noted on several occasions throughout the data that these "experts" are often sought out for paid opportunities despite the availability of much more knowledgeable, qualified and skilled Black, queer, trans or disabled experts. The question of why someone like Laci Green is so popular is likely answered by her ability to reflect the values of white

cis/heteronormativity or proximity to whiteness. The wielding of whiteness and cis/hetero

privilege is supported by values of white supremacy and cis/heteronormativity regarding

age, body size, disability status and socioeconomic status. The case of Laci Green, and

level of 'success' and status she achieved, is one such example.

Prior to this research and specific mention from Ericka Hart in the episode of

Trauma Queen, I was unfamiliar with Laci Green. A quick internet search produced her

Wikipedia page, which lists her accomplishments. According to her Wikipedia page, Laci

gained recognition through her personal YouTube channel where she began posting sex

education videos after she became popular, using her position as a "sex educator." Her

Wikipedia page also states that she is a frequent lecturer at universities (often on behalf

of Planned Parenthood), has been a featured guest on high profile shows such as Dr. Phil,

as well as hosting "science based" shows on large platforms such as Discovery channel

and MTV. In 2015 TIME Magazine named her in the top 30 most influential YouTubers.

Additionally, in 2015 Laci was the keynote at the National Conference of Sex Education.

As Hart mentions, Laci Green was soon revealed to have some deeply troubling

positions that support biological essentialism (binary genders and heterosexuality as

"natural"), and made statements that supported racism and transmisogyny, including

statements like "both sides of the argument are valid" (Green, 2017). In the quote above,

Hart asks the rhetorical question of why anyone believed what she was saying in the first

place (Eborn, 2019). Why did no one know she that carried racist and transphobic

beliefs? Because no one cared to know until it became too obvious to deny, and racism

and transmisogyny are built-in and prioritized in dominant cultural norms.

Privileging Mediocracy

With so many accolades, high profile attention, and based on Ericka Hart's introduction of her name as an example of problematic white women, I felt it relevant to include a podcast in the data sampling where Laci was present. As referenced in Chapter 3, during the data collection phase of this research, I performed a specific search for 'Laci Green' in podcasts. I chose to include the episode of *Ear Biscuits* from 2015. While there was a more recent podcast option in the result list, the title did not suggest it was a sexuality-focused episode topic, so I choose the episode from 2015 where she was interviewed as a guest specifically for her knowledge and position as a "sex educator." The podcast episode from 2015 seems to chronologically correlate with the height of her popularity. A few quotes from this podcast have already been included in this chapter, specifically as an additional occurrence of participation in purity ceremonies. However, the discourse present in the podcast episode was not very rich with information or opportunity for analysis. To put plainly, it was a mediocre episode at best, and might fall into a category of "neutral." However, given the epistemology and methodology of this research, neutrality favors the status quo and current systems of oppression.

Laci Green was elevated to these high-level platforms as an expert based on her supposed commitments to sex education and social justice, despite no evidence to support such status. According to the interview on the *Ear Biscuits* podcast, she is a self-proclaimed expert on sex and is "really good at doing research" (McLaughlin & Neal, 2015). Perhaps aware of the potential legal and ethical ramifications of falsely identifying oneself in an expert position without any qualifications, she calls herself "a friend" who people go to for advice (McLaughlin & Neal, 2015). Her elevation to high-level platforms positions her to speak from a position of "expert" that has power of influence

both online and with the professional audiences she speaks to. This is not a neutral place to be.

Unfortunately, the example of Laci Green is not unique, nor is she particularly extraordinary in any way (such as in her presentation and knowledge). As the upcoming examples will illustrate, she offers no insight, knowledge, or analysis in her interview. Overall, she appears to be quite average. Interestingly, that may be the answer to Hart's rhetorical question of why she was believed in the first place. An average, cis/heteronormative appearing white women with nonthreatening ideas of white feminism.

As an initial example, in the *Ear Biscuits* interview the host makes a comment about being a sex educator and talking about sex a lot, the aforementioned "only qualification necessary" for expert status, and proceed to make joke about a water bottle, asking Laci "can you describe it like it's a vagina?" (McLaughlin & Neal, 2015). The implication being that the extent of her skill was in being sexually descriptive regarding everyday objects, and undertones perhaps of the white sexism and strangely objectifying questions that women often are asked in interviews. Often, such lowbrow jokes about anatomy are also motivated by discomfort in sex discussions. However, Laci plays along by laughing and pretending to begin such a description. Unfortunately, this level of simplistic discourse is continued throughout the episode. While describing her role as sex educator she presents her position and philosophy:

> We need to arm people with information. Knowledge is power. You know, all that
> good stuff. And I think that the guiding philosophy is there's nothing wrong with
> your body. There's nothing wrong with sexuality. Really what we want to do is be

real about how people feel, and make sure that they're equipped to be safe, so that

we can minimize harm. Right, right. Like in public health terms, I'm very much

about harm reduction. I'm not about telling you what to do, what not to do, but to

figure out how to do whatever you're going to do in the safest way possible. So

when I'm giving advice to people about relationships, or sexuality or gender,

whatever, it's very focused on taking care of the person and making sure that they're

safe (McLaughlin & Neal, 2015)

While on the surface this statement appears to be in line with critical sexuality at the

individual level of experience. "All that good stuff" about knowledge as power, sexuality

and bodies as inherently good, falls flat without a deeper analysis and understanding. She

illustrates my point in the following statement:

I actually think that the abstinence movement does have some good intentions at

heart. They just want to protect the heart, right? But it's misguided, because that's

not how it's not what teenagers respond to (McLaughlin & Neal, 2015)

To say that the abstinence-only movement "has good intentions at heart" is akin to saying

that colonizers had good intentions at heart when they occupied and exploited people and

land for profit. The statement is ahistorical, ignoring context and lacking any level of

analysis. She goes on to say that this is supported in her own experience and the data,

calling into question what data she is referring to.

 I had expected her episode to yield rich and complex opportunities for analysis, but

unfortunately that was not the case. The content from that episode did not produce rich

data for this research and therefore has not been particularly showcased in the findings

chapters beyond the presence of a couple of quotes from her experience with purity

culture or religion, and her name as this example for inequity and privilege. This lack of

exceptionalism provides further evidence of the way cis/heteronormativity is privileged,

rewarded, and used to maintain the status quo.

    The case focus of Laci Green is not meant to single her out in any way. Her story

of unearned influence and prestige is normativity in a nutshell. We see this reflected in

many ways, including a culture that allows uninformed white women to gain recognition

over a highly skilled and knowledgeable Black woman or femme.

Summary Thus Far

    This chapter of the findings includes the explicit discourse and discussion of sex

mis/education and the role of the sex educator that was present in the data. As evidenced

by previous research and in the data presented above, the current state of sex education in

the United States is extremely lacking. As it stands today, what is passed off as sex

education is really an education that functions to further a patriarchal and white

supremacist agenda using a binary gender role hierarchy and the construction of purity

and worthiness. The experiences reported in this chapter highlight the way insufficient

sex education fails to provide information or knowledge that equips people with the

information and skills needed to understand their emerging desires and changing bodies,

to negotiate relationships, or have a healthy adult relationship with sexuality and gender.

The role of religion as sex educator contributes to misinformation, confusion, and deep

shame. With no other alternative sex educator to be found, the dominant culture becomes

the educator gender and sexuality through media, exposure to adults in life, etc.

    The implicit (and often explicit) communication of essentialist views on gender

and sexuality in early sex education perpetuate dominant cultural narratives of binary

genders including concepts of purity, the 'good girl' dichotomy, and the erasure of female sexuality and agency. The paradox of a culture of silence perpetuates misinformation that contributes to confusion and shame in relationships with self and others. The professional field of sex education expands beyond primary and secondary schooling and professional sex educators are often tasked with both reeducating adults with basic information and addressing the long-term impact of a sex-negative culture and the misinformation that it carries. The quality of work and depth of analysis on the part of sex educator can vary greatly depending on their understanding of history, power and structural analysis.

While the issues of heteropatriarchy and anti-Blackness were infused within the discourse around sex mis/education, there was a clear absence of any mention of disabled experiences or bodies. Disabled youth and adults are notoriously excluded from sex education both figuratively, in that the sex mis/education provided in primary and secondary education excludes the mention or inclusion of disabled bodies, and literally in that disabled young people are not provided with the sex education classes, however insufficient, as their nondisabled peers. This is particularly harmful for disabled folks in the context of how rape culture is perpetuated though the paradox of silence and consent about who or how someone can touch one's body. The absence of disability in the sex education discourse mirrors the dominant cultural discourse of an ableist society. This is further explored in upcoming chapters.

In the words of Ericka Hart, and as aligned with the critical sexuality studies framework, transparency about one's background and an intersectional pedagogy that is includes an explicit anti-racism, anti-ableist and anti-capitalism stance is integral to my

research question of how cis/heteronormativity is replicated or challenged in discourse

(Eborn, 2019). The connection to therapeutic discourse is made by the evidence of what

is "normal," and as a result of leaving sex education over the lifespan at the hands of the

dominant culture. The lack of critical and structural analysis of cis/heteronormativity

perpetuates harm towards those who within historically marginalized communities or

social locations, such as BIPOC, LGBTQ+ and disabled communities. When the role of

sex educator is filled only or primarily by the dominant culture narratives, what lessons

are taught? When the dominant culture is your only sex educator, what then do you teach

or perpetuate to others when you are positioned as sex educator?

There is often an assumption that white, cis/heteronormative, nondisabled

communities are functioning perfectly fine within the matrix of cis/heteronormativity.

White supremacy culture absolutely benefits white people and access to power, wealth,

opportunity and legitimacy, but on a relational level and intrapsychic level, these systems

of oppression are damaging and unhealthy for everyone, although clearly to different

degrees. The following chapter explores this point through the discourse of podcasts that

lack an analysis of power and fall under the category of replicating oppressive structures

and lacking a structural analysis.

Chapter 5 Findings: Discourse without Structural Analysis

The previous chapter presents explicit discourse on the topic of sex education and the role of the sex educator, as well as the critical discourse analysis of the implicit themes and lessons that are communicated in the experiences of the speakers. The theme of damaging and insufficient information was pervasive in the experiences of sex education with lasting effects into adulthood. The experience of sex mis/education provides the foundation for discourse presented in this Chapter 5 and the upcoming Chapter 6. Given the literature reviewed in previous chapters and the findings in Chapter 4 of sex/miseducation, it is reasonable to assume the experience of insufficient sex education across the lifespan extends to the speakers and listeners within the podcasts presented in this research, unless the speakers specifically state they have sought out additional training in comprehensive sex education. As illustrated in chapter 4, transparency about one's background and an intersectional pedagogy that includes an explicit anti-racism, anti-ableist and anti-capitalism stance is integral in the role of sex educator. In addition to transparency about one's background and explicit stance, the position of the speaker is implicitly communicated through their discursive practices. This chapter includes discourse from the podcasts the analysis of discourse which lacks a structural and power analysis and subsequently perpetuate cis/heteronormativity, beginning with information on the background of the data.

Overview and Background of Chapter 5 Data

As introduced in Chapter 3, exploring the background of the data includes the characteristics of the podcast, intended audience and purpose, and the characteristics of the author or host and guest if applicable (Mullet, 2018). The podcasts included in this chapter share similarities in purpose, as stated through the descriptions of the podcasts

and their websites, as providing "expert advice on sex and relationships", specifically

"marriage" (Kosterlitz & Kosterlitz, 2019a, 2019b; Jameson, 2019a, 2019b; Schlessinger,

2019a, 2019b). The tagline for *The Bad Girls Bible* states the promise of "have better sex

tonight" (Jameson 2019a, 2019b) and the website description states the host provides

weekly interviews with professional experts to teach tips and techniques to improve your

sex life, relationship or marriage (Jameson 2019a, 2019b). Such 'expert advice' is

promised across these podcasts and legitimized by taglines such as *Dr. Laura Call of the*

Day as "America's #1 Marriage, Family and Parenting Expert" (Schlessinger, 2019b) and

The I Do/ Relationship Podcast as "#1 Marriage and Dating Podcast on iTunes"

(Kosterlitz & Kosterlitz, 2019a). While the fact that these podcasts did appear in the top

searches during data collection could point to their popularity and wide exposure,

evidence of such popularity equating to "expert" status is not provided beyond theses

taglines. The usefulness of a podcast does not require an expert position to be valuable or

informational. These podcasts, however, seem to rely on expert status as the basis of their

validity. This priority of position of expert also identifies a power dynamic that is not

addressed or named. Furthermore, the excepts and analysis in this chapter will also

illustrate how this power dynamic is clearly exploited.

        Each of these podcasts explicitly states "marriage" in their descriptions, and

although marriage in the United States is no longer restricted to heterosexual and

cisgender relationships, marriage is a legal and economic designation and privilege that is

not equitably accessible to all adults in relationships. The use of this label communicates

a privileging of monogamous marriage and could be seen as code for cis/heteronormative

relationships and/or cisgender, nondisabled and heterosexual individuals. In addition, the

marketing of "expert advice" is highly misleading to listeners and the information

provided could easily be damaging and harmful for any listener who may therefore

assume the advice is somehow legitimate. The overall lack of positionality provided in

these podcasts means that, in addition to a lack of sufficient evidence on expert status, the

speakers do not identify their background or social location including race, gender,

disability status, class or sexuality. As discussed in previous chapters, this lack of

positionality presumes the default of cisgender, heterosexual, white, and nondisabled.

There is little information about the hosts of these podcasts. I was not able to find

any information about or images of Sean Jameson, host of *Bad Girls Bible*. The

information provided on the *I Do/Relationship Podcast* website includes images of the

hosts who presumably appear to be white and cisgender. They state they are married

which therefore provides the assumption of heterosexuality. There is no mention of

disability status. In the case of Dr. Laura, the use of "Dr." could communicate her

education as a position of "expert," and images on her website provide assumptions of

cisgender and white. She specifically positions herself as an expert therapist, however,

her website states her PhD in physiology and a certificate in marriage and family

counseling with no evidence of licensure to establish her ability/authority/qualification to

provide such counsel. Her use of phrases such as providing advice "guided by ethics,

morals and loving, committed relationships" provides code for understanding her position

is aligned with or rooted in a religious perspective (Schlessinger, 2019a).

In the episodes which include expert guest interviews, brief information of the

guests is provided in the introduction but once again does not include explicit

positionality of race, gender, disability or sexuality. In one episode highlighted later in

this chapter, the guests are a presumably cisgender, nondisabled, white, heterosexual

couple whose expertise is based upon having authored a gendered book on "how to have

sex every day" (Jameson, 2019a). In another episode the guest writes a relationship blog

and notes that her previous professional position was in tech. She cites her own 20 years

of marriage as part of her expertise and qualification for her current career in working

with couples and sexuality (Kosterlitz & Kosterlitz, 2019c). These personal experiences

and positions are valuable; however, these podcasts position them as providing expert

advice beyond their scope of ability. While they may have valuable information for

listeners, this can easily be conflated with actual and factual information in the realm of

sex education, which is explicit in the purpose of the podcasts. In two episodes the guests

are licensed mental health professionals which means they should be providing

information that is aligned with the standards of the profession and mindful of systems of

oppression and bias (Kosterlitz & Kosterlitz, 2019b; Jameson, 2019b). One such licensed

professional is also an AASECT-certified sex therapist, which does mean they have

received extensive sex education and supervision in sexuality and sex education

(Jameson, 2019b). This additional training and education however, does not translate to

guarantee the absence of harm and perpetuating of systems of oppression as is illustrated

in the data from this episode presented in the section "Fear of a Sexless Marriage".

These examples illustrate the importance of explicit anti-oppressive stance and education

which is further communicated through the presence or absence of structural and power

analysis in discursive practices.

In addition to the lack of positionality provided in these podcasts, the discourse

within these episodes does not met the priorities of the critical sexuality studies

framework presented in previous chapters (Fahs & McClelland, 2016). To review, there

is no conceptual analysis provided in the discourse. For example, this allows for the guest

or host to make validity claims such as "an otherwise good marriage" (Jameson, 2019a)

without any explanation, definition or criteria for what is meant by a "good marriage."

There is no attention to abject bodies throughout these episodes, including no mention of

disability, no mention of experiences that may possibly require a different approach or

provide context for a specific "concern" raised in the discourse, and why this may or may

not be an actual "concern." This means there is an assumed universality about the

information being provided as relevant to all bodies, and in addition to the lack of

challenging of heterosexual privilege, this also means no awareness variation in body

functioning beyond the presence of one penis and one vulva/vagina, including variation

for aging bodies. When the mention of beauty standards is present, for example, there is

no challenging of the validity of such standards, and only mentioned as something

individuals may struggle with adhering to (particularly limited to cis women) and perhaps

as a reason they (she) may not be living up to the unsaid/unnamed expectations of the

relationship.

  The meta theory presented in Chapter 2 outlines the ways in which

cis/heteronormativity has functioned to support settler colonialism, capitalism, ableism

and white supremacy, which perpetuate concepts of "natural" or "normal" through

domination, culture and socialization. Therefore, cis/heteronormativity dictates a

hierarchy of legitimacy and validity in sexuality, gender and relationships. At the top of

the hierarchy is binary cisgender identities, roles, and experiences, coupled with

heterosexual attraction and legal, monogamous marriage. Race, class and disability are

also embedded within this hierarchy. Consequently, the criteria for inclusion at the top of

this hierarchy also dictates strict exclusionary criteria for the validity of white,

nondisabled, cisgender, heterosexual and monogamous relationships and experiences.

This Chapter 5 presents discourse within the top of this hierarchy and the tension between

the content of the discourse and the underlying processes of such inclusion/exclusion.

Discourse present in these relationship advice podcasts, and what is left unsaid, allows

for dominant cultural narratives and assumptions to remain unchallenged.

Analysis of Discourse Directed at Cis/hetero Audience

The following segments illustrate discourse within podcasts that appear to be

directed towards a cisgender and heterosexual audience. This chapter is organized into

five themes: the fear of a sexless marriage, questions about attraction to partner,

performative attempts to value cis women's sexuality, and desires to be "normal" or

"natural." The final theme highlights conversation about evolution and monogamy as the

cultural ideal. These themes share underlying assumptions of what constitutes a

legitimate and valid relationship, and the "advice" provided appears to be directed at how

to achieve, maintain, or restore individual/relational "legitimacy" under the rules of

cis/heteronormativity.

While these themes were present across podcast episodes, this chapter presents

these themes by focusing on one episode per section or theme. The decision to present

one extended example of these themes was made in an effort to allow the reader to have

deeper continuity and discursive context for the themes. Each podcast will be introduced

as they are presented, including available information on host, guest, and stated purpose

of the podcast and/or episode. Across these podcast episodes is an explicit overarching

theme of negotiating of sex in relationships. Implicit undertones of wrestling with the

erasure of cis women's sexuality, confusion about normative expectations, and gendered stereotypes are present throughout.

Despite the fact that the purpose of these podcasts is to support relationships and assumably provide sex-positive information, the themes presented in this chapter could easily be labeled as sex-negative. Cultural narratives about what a relationship "should" look like are rarely challenged, and "advice" on how to reach normative assumptions is the apparent goal. The first theme presented is based on legitimacy of a relationship through discourse on the fear of the sexless marriage.

The Fear of the Sexless Marriage

Dominant cultural narratives provide rigid guidelines for acceptable experiences of sex, sexuality and gender. A legal and monogamous marriage of a cisgender and heterosexual couple is placed at the top of the hierarchy and sole arena of where sex or sexual expression is deemed appropriate. However, even for the top of the hierarchy, rules and guidelines still apply. This segment highlights the cultural narratives of the measurement of legitimacy based upon the presence or frequency of sex in a marriage. Another normative assumption pervasive in the discourse is the conflation of orgasm and pleasure. In cis/heteronormative discourse, pleasure is not discussed outside of the concept of orgasm. The fear of a "sexless marriage" is answered with advice around orgasms. The cultural narrative around "orgasm as the goal" of a sexual experience is often accompanied by blame and accusations of pathology when an orgasm is not part of the experience.

The *Bad Girls Bible* is a podcast hosted by Sean Jameson. No information about the host is provided online or in the introduction of the podcast. The tagline for the

podcast is "have better sex tonight" (Jameson, 2019a). In the episode titled "How to fix a sexless marriage and reignite fiery passion," Laurie Watson is the featured guest and introduced as a licensed therapist, certified sex therapist and author of a book about healing a sexless marriage (Jameson, 2019b). In introducing herself, Laurie provides an explanation of her work:

> Laurie (guest): Well, I'm a sex therapist clinically which means I work with couples and individuals and women who were referred by their gynecologist usually said, "you know, I just don't want it…I used to want it but I could care less if I ever had sex again." And I was like, "How is that possible? It's not like going to the dentist, right? It's this fun experience, why are they not wanting sex?" and so, I began to hear this complaint as actually separate issues and that was the book I wrote. I wrote it for the woman who has low libido, and there are many different reasons for that, and I wanted them to both have something where they were understood as well as get some direction in terms of how to get through this so that they can have that spice of life back (Jameson, 2019b)

In this introduction Laurie identifies client referrals from gynecologists who were cisgender women (presumably) experiencing low libidos. She does not provide any further clarification of intended audience of her book or the upcoming podcast discussion. This lack of clarification alludes to the content being implicitly directed at cisgender and heterosexual monogamous couples, which seems to also include the presence of children. In the following segment she is explaining her experience married women:

Laurie: They were both busy and tired and exhausted and they often prioritize the

children over their marriage. She began to feel like you know, 'Sex is so much

hassle, it takes me so long to reach orgasm, let's just get it over with.' She really

stopped having orgasms during the sexual experience, so her libido plummeted

because what I say is, if there's no big bang, there's no big deal (Jameson, 2019b)

There is an undertone present in the statement "she stopped having orgasms," and the

assumption that this was a choice on the woman's part which seems to place blame on the

woman. By providing her thesis of "if there's no big bang, there's no big deal," this

clinician is prioritizing conversation and conflation of orgasm as pleasure. While there is

existing research suggesting vaginal lubrication, which occurs during arousal, can help

with preventing or reducing vaginal atrophy (which can often occur in or after

menopause and creates pain or discomfort with penetration), the lack of conceptual

analysis positions her statements as highly misleading and shame-inducing. The arousal

stage of human sexuality is not defined by the presence or absence of an orgasm. While

many people do want to have orgasms during sexual experiences, this may not be the

case for everyone. The "orgasm as the ultimate goal" narrative is rife with ableism and

unspoken assumptions about the value of bodies and pleasure being connected to the

presence of an orgasm.

Laurie goes on to try to dispel myths and provide education about anatomy to the

listeners:

Laurie (guest): Only 15% of women climax through sexual intercourse, only 15%.

And women come to me all the time and say, "I'm dysfunctional. I am not

climaxing through intercourse," it's like, "no, you're not dysfunctional."

Sean Jameson (host): It could be your man (Jameson, 2019b).

The need for this educational statement underlines the fact that many people do not know the basic anatomy and functions of their bodies, particularly bodies with vulvas. Though she does not explicitly state this information, the reason that the majority of people with vulvas do not climax during "intercourse" is because the clitoris is often, but not always, the source of orgasm as it contains more nerve endings than any other piece of anatomy or erectile tissue, including a penis. The dominant cultural or heteronormative narrative for cisgender women puts the focus on the vagina, but ultimately prioritizes a penis, once again putting the ownership of the pleasure in the cisgender male experience. However, there is no one way or right way to experience pleasure. This statement also speaks to the trends of self-worth and self-blame that accompany the sex-negative and heteronormative culture – "something is wrong with me." However, the guest's prior focus on orgasm-as-goal undermines any empowerment of this information, and rather reinforces that without the orgasm, you are in fact not enough because "no big bang, no big deal."

While the presumed goal of the guest was to provide information here, potentially providing an opportunity to challenge oppressive normativity, the host inserts a last remark. The host's comment that "it could be your man" diverts shame from the woman to the man, and while this may be an attempt to subvert the power, it ultimately just transfers shame and reinforces that men have the power or control of pleasure. If something is wrong with your man, he just isn't "giving" you pleasure. On another level this could imply that cis/hetero men are the ones who don't know what they are doing, and this may not be a huge stretch – as in, if cis/hetero women are unaware of their own anatomy how would cis men know otherwise? If the logical next thought is that cis men

would learn through some other avenue than is provided to cis women, one example

might be having cis/hetero sexual experiences and learning from partners who know their

own bodies. Ultimately this is the opposite of slut shaming; cisgender heterosexual men

are not only allowed to be sexual, they are *expected* to be, lest they be shamed that they

don't know "enough." Polarizing trends and their dependence on each other are part of

oppressive mechanisms.

Gendered expectations remain unexamined and held as the ideal to measure one's

validity against. The shame that accompanies falling short of such ideals motivates an

individual to work harder to meet the expectation, looking for reasons they may fall short

as an individual versus the desire to interrogate the assumptions. According to the

professional therapist in the segment explored below, "sexless marriage" is a deeply

shameful thing and therefore the topic of the episode:

> Sean (host): I'm wondering if you could give our listeners maybe an example then
>
> of how an otherwise good marriage becomes a sexless marriage and how that
>
> process unfolds and then hopefully how they can fix it.
>
> Laurie (guest): I'm really glad you asked this because I have a scary stat to tell
>
> you. Within two years of marriage, one third of all couples are sexless and it's
>
> two years of committed coupleship or marriage. One third! I mean, Shawn, that's
>
> incredible! And it is not because we're growing old and approaching menopause
>
> or because the children are distracting us. It's actually before children enter the
>
> relationship oftentimes. Why is that?
>
> Sean Jameson (host): Yeah, why is that?

Laurie (guest): Is it just, "Well, sex has become boring because we're with the

same person" or what happens? I think that there's a really distinct problem. I call

it the power struggle between the pursuer and the distancer in the relationship.

Every one of us wants two things, we want to love and be loved, that's closeness,

we also want our own autonomy to pursue our purpose in life, to do what we feel

called to do, to feel what we're, what we enjoy, our hobbies, our personal

interests. When we do one thing, it takes away from the other. If I'm at work, I'm

not with my family, if I'm with my family, I'm not fulfilling my purpose perfectly

(Jameson, 2019b).

In addition to some neoliberal capitalist assumptions embedded in here, this therapist has

some strong binary ideas that are coming through: the phrase "an otherwise good

marriage" implies that the sexless marriage is in itself, not "good." While there is no

information about what research she is citing, it is of course true that there is a wide range

of frequency and sexual behavior in relationships. "Sex with same person must be

boring" puts pressure on one of the partners to "be good enough" and perhaps do

whatever they can to "keep the other person interested" – note the lack of emphasis on

personal pleasure or shared pleasure. The binary and reductive statements may be due to

lack of time but ultimately communicate a "problem" that the therapist can assert herself

as the one who can provide the "answer" to the audience. The initial exchange here

sounds like an informercial because it basically is.

She goes on to assert that the validity and legitimacy of a relationship is

dependent upon the presence of sex:

Laurie Watson (guest): I mean it really takes confrontation. It takes saying, "You know, this is not a marriage" or "It is not a relationship that's without sex. We are distinguishing romantic relationship from friendship. If you want to call this a friendship, okay we're friends and we are living together but we are not really having a romantic relationship because romance requires sexuality. So if you want to be in this we need to have a solution here" (Jameson, 2019b)

According to these statements, there is a very clear and specific definition of what a legitimate relationship or marriage looks like, and it literally hinges on a specific act of sex (because sexuality is not about just behaviors). Because she does not specify what behaviors she is referencing, the default is the cis/heteronormative definition of sex; specifically, penetration of a penis into a vagina. There is no identified audience or positioning of the speakers and conversation from a particular point of view, and therefore if a listener is not cisgender and heterosexual, they are immediately rendered illegitimate in this discussion. Lesbian, gay, queer, transgender, and nonbinary people are not part of this speaker's presumed definition of "legitimate marriage." Demisexual or asexual people are completely left out of the concept of a legitimate relationship, and likewise automatically deemed invalid. Any physically disabled person, fat bodies, or anybody with accessibility barriers is invalid as well. Therefore, only a cisgender, heterosexual, nondisabled marriage is considered legitimate. For those who do fit into this narrow definition of legitimacy, this amounts to the policing of what a "good marriage" is, and marriage without sex under this definition is neither worthy nor valid. Such assumed universal positions are a form of exclusion.

There is also a false permission given to allow a couple to agree to whether sex is or isn't part of the relationship. You *can* have a marriage without sex, but then it is *not* a marriage. The price is shame and erasure/illegitimacy. This kind of false dichotomy is ever-present in cis/heteronormativity. You can choose this, but then it is not this. People are not free to define their own relationships. This perpetuates the cycle of capitalism; internalized messages of "not good enough" and external seeking of services sold as solutions, including demand for a market of 'experts' to provide answers.

Despite the mention of "power struggles" in the preceding segment, an analysis or explanation of power is absent, allowing power to function in the background unchallenged. In addition, the power dynamics of the "expert" and client/caller remain unaddressed. In the upcoming content titled "Am I doing this right?." this dynamic continues, as does the implicit discourse of what constitutes a valid, legitimate relationship, and criteria for inclusion in the "good girl" narrative.

Am I Doing This Right? Am I Ready To Get Married?

The contradictions present in dominant cultural narratives and norms surrounding gender, sexuality and relationships can create confusion. The theme of this section is the underlying notion of such confusion which leads callers to ask the expert, "am I doing this right?" In the following analyses there is a clear and explicit power dynamic between "expert" (or host of the podcast) and the caller. This section of analysis also combines previous themes from the dominant narratives presented in Chapter 4, such as slut shaming and erasure of cisfemale sexuality and agency.

The podcast titled *Caller of the Day* is hosted by Laura Schlessinger who markets herself as "Dr. Laura: America's #1 Relationship talk show host." According to her website, she earned a masters and doctoral degree in physiology.

In the short but two-part episode titled "Am I Ready to Get Married?/Not Feeling a

Sexual Spark," the caller begins by asking permission to give some background

information before she asks her actual question, and Dr. Laura seems happy to oblige

(Schlessinger, 2019a). The caller Rose briefly outlines her childhood of growing up in a

religious home with negative messages and fear-based learning.

After the caller gives a few minutes of background, Dr. Laura pushes her to talk

about why she is calling today. Rose begins by stating that in her 20s she had "a string of

unhealthy, only physical relationships with sexual partners" and "had commitment issues

with all these boys" (Schlessinger, 2019a). Dr. Laura becomes agitated at this description

and offers her own interpretation for the caller's experience:

> Dr. Laura: stop with commitment issues, stop that crap. That's psychobabble I don't
>
> like hearing that.
>
> Caller Rose: Okay.
>
> Dr. Laura: You became slutty because that made you feel …??
>
> Caller Rose: good.
>
> Dr. Laura: Ok, in what way did it make you feel good? It made you think... what?
>
> (Schlessinger, 2019a)

There is no further evidence of the caller's relationships beyond the statement of "a string

of unhealthy, only physical relationships" to which Dr. Laura then labeled as "slutty"

behavior, placing blame on the caller as opposed to another interpretation of this

statement, such as abusive or domestic violence situations. I do not know how these

callers are screened for the podcast and perhaps Dr. Laura had information outside of

what the caller is recorded saying. However, she made the distinct decision to go in the

direction of labeling the caller as "slutty" versus framing the experiences in a more sex-positive way, perhaps by highlighting that this was a time where Rose was exploring her sexuality or physical experiences. The caller does not seem to dispute this label, although, any dispute would be a huge challenge to the power dynamic implicit in seeking out the "advice of an expert"

> Dr Laura then goes on to ask "In what way did it make you feel good? It made you think… what?"
>
> Caller Rose: It made me feel like I was pretty and wanted.
>
> Dr. Laura: Got it. Okay. So it made you feel like you were pretty because you could get a guy to screw you and you were wanted because you could get a guy to screw you.
>
> Caller Rose: Correct.
>
> Dr. Laura: Of course guys will screw anything that slows down enough. So it really wasn't a compliment.
>
> Caller Rose: You're right. (Schlessinger, 2019a)

Dr. Laura first seems to have curiosity for the caller's motives and then uses the caller's own words in what feels like verbal entrapment. Adding the words "you could get a guy to screw you" places all sexual agency on the man. The implicit message is that she is a vessel for his pleasure, he does the screwing, he has the power. Once she receives verbal agreement Dr. Laura comes in with the final blow: "Men will screw anything that slows down enough, so it really wasn't a compliment." In other words, not only are you not pretty and not wanted, but you're not special either.

After the caller states that she "stopped this (implied: slutty) behavior" two years

ago and decided to focus on going to the gym, working and reconnecting with her

religious parents. All three of which are praised and valued under capitalism and, along

with the caller's submissiveness, provide Dr. Laura with evidence she is a "good girl." As

outlined in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, focus on "working" (or producing) and reconnecting

with religious family are highly valued under the capitalist system. Heteropatriarchy

values a specific family structure which includes "Christian values," and Rose is

"reconnecting" to these values. Additionally, "going to the gym" implies the value of

healthism and perhaps nondisabled status. It is the combination of these three things that

evidence a moving from a devalued place of "slutty" to the lofty position of a "good girl"

that carries assumptions that are not made explicit. The caller's submissiveness to Dr.

Laura's aggressive questioning provides further evidence of Rose now being a "good

girl" which allows Dr. Laura to continue the conversation:

> Dr. Laura: Why did you not want to hear you were pretty or think you were pretty
>
> and be wanted. Why did that stop?
>
> Rose: It stops because it started to feel empty. Um I started to see that, that isn't
>
> true love.
>
> Dr. Laura: Yes. Brilliant. See how good you are when you're give yourself a
>
> moment. It's excellent.
>
> Caller Rose: (giggles) Thank you (Schlessinger, 2019a)

In the context of the episode, it appears that Dr. Laura approves of her answer, as

evidenced by her not interrupting or rephrasing for the caller, and her subsequent giving

of praise and acceptance. Having to only ask a question once to get the answer she

desires, Dr. Laura says "see how you are good [when you don't rush to answer

wrongly]," and the exchange reeks of piety and the good girl narrative. Speaking to the

lesson of what it means to be a good girl, Dr. Laura uses the compliment to validate the

caller – see you were slutty, but now you are good.

     An additional marker for "worth" and "goodness" in an ableist and capitalist

society is employment status, which carries the assumptions of productivity and class

position. To assess this marker of worth, Dr. Laura asks a quick question:

     Dr. Laura: Do you work for a living? Are you good at it? (Schlessinger, 2019a)

Once the caller confirms she does in fact "work a living", she is permitted to continue

with the conversation. At this point in the episode, six minutes in, Dr. Laura directs the

caller towards the original reason for the call, and Rose finally gets an attempt to ask her

question that motivated her call (Schlessinger, 2019a). Rose states that a little over a year

ago she met a "lovely" man who "treats me right" and "our morals and life views

completely line up" (Schlessinger, 2019a). Dr. Laura interrupts her sentence and asks:

> Dr. Laura: Yeah and about those 'morals and life views'… does he know about
>
> your little ahh, episode?
>
> Caller Rose: Yes, we were completely open and honest with each other
>
> (Schlessinger, 2019a)

The tone of Dr. Laura's statement is condescending and appears almost to be mocking as

if the implicit message is 'yeah, you have no morals.'

> Dr. Laura: Ok what can I do?
>
> Rose: Everything lining up perfectly with him and we've been dating for a year, we
>
> are, have been engaged. We just got engaged a month ago and are planning our

wedding for a year from now. So all of a sudden I'm looking at him and I'm like

questioning myself do I really love you, sometimes I'm not attracted to us.

Dr. Laura: Excuse me. Excuse me. You really don't know if you love him because

you haven't known him long enough, I always advise people two years before they

make that decision. So your nervousness about this, to me is intelligent.

The truth is, you don't know him well enough. In the next year, you will – you

never should have gotten engaged, because you don't know him. You just know that

he's a lovely young man. And he's very nice. We have to go through a lot of more

things with him for the next year for you to determine whether or not he can carry

you over a tsunami (Schlessinger, 2019a)

Dr. Laura informs the caller and the audience that two years is the acceptable amount of

time to know someone and to be ready to marry. She is very specific that a woman needs

two years to know 'If he can carry you over a tsunami,' implying first that the woman

needs someone to carry her through hardships, and second that it is the sole measurement

of the relationship and of a man (Schlessinger, 2019a).

       There was an experience of being on an emotional rollercoaster as the listener,

and perhaps also for the caller, where insults are followed up with compliments or "love

bombing." Dr Laura responds with either shame and shut down or provide a compliment

akin to "good girl" based on what she wants to hear. This can be interpreted as when a

caller says something that fits into the world view that Dr Laura ascribes to but has yet to

be explicit in naming fully. For this caller, the approval of Dr. Laura seems to be the goal

of the exchange, versus the need for actual information.

Dr. Laura seems to think she has given the answer to why the caller has contacted her by outlining how one year is insufficient and that waiting until they have known each other two years is actually the magic number and enough time to be truly in love, and it is clear that true love is when a man can carry a woman through hard times.

Evidence of Dr. Laura's worldview and personal experience comes shortly after when the caller says she is worried because there is a lack of spark with her fiancé:

Caller Rose: Um, Do I have time to ask just one more question?

Dr. Laura: Oh well you're awfully cute and I would adopt you. So yeah, go ahead, ask another.

Caller Rose: Thank you. I think you already answered this thing and ask anyway, so you have permission to yell at me. Sometimes when I look at my fiancé, I don't feel the same physical spark that I would feel with some of the jerky guys I was physical with before him.

Dr. Laura: Yeah, that's normal.

Caller Rose: That is?! Okay. [audible exhale] Okay.

There is audible relief in the caller's voice, a clear exhale that communicates "oh thank god I am normal; my feelings are normal." Which reflects the enormous power that the "expert" holds over the caller. By coupling the statement "you're awfully cute" with granting permission to ask another question, Dr. Laura reinforces the caller's value and worth as attached to her "cuteness" or submission. In other words, the caller has provided evidence of "being a good girl" throughout the call, and because of this, she has been granted permission or privilege to ask another question.

At this point there are so many different avenues of discussion that could help this young woman navigate her feelings, her expectations, and empower her in the process of understanding what sounds like to be a concern over what love is "supposed to" feel like. She is then met with the following statement from the "expert" she has called for advice:

> Dr. Laura: Oh, yeah. That's normal. I see a movie with Burt Lancaster when he was 30. And that lights my fire more than anybody I think I've ever known in the universe. That doesn't mean anything. Because there's a difference between sex and making love, and you're not going to have quote, sex with your husband with the same new spectacular, this is exciting, it is new. You're going to be making love to him. You're going to be consciously doing the things that bring you together physically. Because you love him. Not necessarily because you're horny.
>
> Caller Rose: right
>
> Dr. Laura: If we only waited for when we were horny. That'd be very little sex in the world.
>
> Caller Rose: Okay, I just wrote that down. Oh Dr. Laura you just made me feel so much better.

The caller is happy, jotting notes down like an obedient student. The call ends.

Some implicit messages in this statement from Dr. Laura's perspective are as follows:

1. I have never felt 'my fire lit' by a person in real life as I have with watching a celebrity on the screen that I never met in person

2. Even though I acknowledge I *have* felt this 'fire' in my body, I know that it doesn't mean anything. In other words, I should not trust the messages that my body gives me (Why? Is this unattainable?)

3. Sex is exciting and spectacular but "making love" is not. Making love is a duty that is done for the purposes of the relationship

4. Making love is how you get closer physically in a relationship when you love someone, and perhaps is the only legitimate way to do so

5. You do not "make love" because you feel a fire, you do it because you are obligated to do so as a woman in a marriage

6. You are obligated to do so *especially* when you don't want to

7. This is just how it is for all people (read: women) OR no one really wants to have sex, we just do it to help the relationship

Not only is sexual pleasure and agency completely absent from these statements, it is actively denied and deemed unimportant in the service of making the marriage work and being close to a partner. The caller is essentially taught to ignore the messages of their body and not to except embodied experiences, in fact to go against embodied experiences. In this last segment it is less clear that this about being a good girl because sexuality is bad, indeed being a good girl means pleasing you husband, but there seems to be more of a sad acceptance that you can't hope for more.

In this section, Dr. Laura has reflected the cultural narrative that women have no claim to pleasure in married sex and that a woman must put these thoughts aside in the service of the needs of the marriage (read: man). According to the dominant cultural narratives, this is what is "normal and expected" in a cis/heterosexual relationship. In response to this cultural narrative, conversations and "advice" on how to prioritize a cis woman's pleasure is the focus of the next segment of analysis. Fluctuation between the

erasure and the prioritizing of cis women's sexuality creates cyclical discourse when a clear structural analysis is absent.

Performative Attempts to Value Cis Women's Pleasure

In the previous sections of The Sexless Marriage and Am I Doing this Right, the underlying conversation of frequency of sex in a relationship is addressed through various entry points that appear to be determined by the cisfemale. For example, in the first segment the expert guest points to the absence of orgasm as the cause of a low libido, while the second segment points to the willingness of the cis woman to provide closeness through sex that is not determined by desire, pleasure or libido. In the following section, the explicit discourse centers on prioritizing cisfemale pleasure as the *answer* to the question of frequency of sex in a relationship. However, once again, such fluctuation between the erasure and prioritizing of female sexuality creates cyclical discourse when a clear structural analysis is absent.

In an episode of the podcast *Bad Girls Bible* entitled "How to have sex everyday" the host interviews Caitlyn and Michael Doemer who have written a book about "how to have sex every day" (Jameson, 2019a). During the introduction of the episode the couple recounts their origin story of coming from other relationships that were not satisfying and finally coming back to date each other. They state that the book is directed at heterosexual couples "because that is what we are" but they do not provide any other information about their positionality or identity. In initial background search their website appears to show them as white. The book itself is gendered in that there is a separate version for cisgender men and a separate version for cisgender women. About 12 minutes into the discussion, they further identify the book is directed at heterosexual *monogamous* couples.

The episode outlines their three-step process for having sex every day in a marriage. There is no conversation about why sex every day is valued above other sex frequencies, or what the benefit of daily sex may be on a relationship. The first step is to sleep naked every day because "it's really hard to be angry with someone when you're laying full body contact naked with them in bed" (Jameson, 2019a). The second step is creating a 'menu' of sexual behaviors or items for each partner to choose from, which seems to be an exercise created to provide a short cut for communication, and the third step is 'she comes first' (Jameson, 2019a).

The third step is introduced as "putting the woman's pleasure first and prioritizing her so that she enjoys the process as much as the man does" (Jameson, 2019a). The transcript of the exchange is below:

> Caitlyn: It's frequently very easy for guys to orgasm and enjoy that pleasure but until the woman is prioritized and she's enjoying it, and she's orgasming every day, it just is lower usually on our priority list. We have a lot of other competing values on our mind and for a lot of reasons, I feel like women tend to move their own pleasure further down on the value scale. So it's about prioritizing pleasure in your marriage and that starts with putting her first, literally coming first.
>
> (Jameson, 2019a)

There are several gendered assumptions in these statements. The primary assumption here is that the idea of prioritizing women's pleasure simply through the presence of orgasms is radical enough to be the focus of a book for cisgender heterosexual married couples. This statement also implies that the presence of orgasm equals pleasure, or that orgasms are the primary goal, and there is an assumption that orgasms must be absent if a

couple is not having sex every day – or more importantly to the book – if there are

women's orgasms present, then you (a presumed cis man) absolutely WILL have sex

every day and have daily orgasms. By stating that "women tend to move their own

pleasure down on the value scale" the assumption is that women are to blame for this or

have made this decision consciously and purposefully on an individual level and omits

any kind of critique on why this might occur, or cultural and structural factors that impact

individuals. The assumption is this is "natural" and somehow biologically based in

cisgender experience. Her husband expands on this by stating:

> **Michael:** And as well as the bigger conversation about masculine versus feminine
>
> and that femininity is about receiving and masculinity about initiating and action.
>
> So that kind of sets the stage for if the man isn't intentional that he can *take action*
>
> and *take his pleasure* without even realizing that there's more there or that she
>
> wants more. So kind of having that understanding and just being willing to take
>
> that in and understanding too that giving her pleasure first leads to a lot more
>
> pleasure [*for him*]. I am willing to bet that sex every day may not sound like an
>
> attainable goal but if your wife or your partner is enjoying it as much as you are,
>
> it's a lot more attainable of a goal. So kind of putting it in that context (emphasis
>
> mine) (Jameson, 2019a)

In this statement, Michael reflects the dominant cultural narrative of fixed binary gender

roles, or femininity as receiving or passivity, and masculinity as initiation or action.

These narratives are presented as fact and foundation for the "advice" he and his wife are

presenting. He is implicitly acknowledging that women's pleasure is not usually part of

the equation, taking a back seat to male pleasure. He reinforces the narrative that men

have sole "control" and agency in the sexual relationship, and once they "take in" that

understanding, the man can unilaterally choose to give the women pleasure "first" with

the goal of "more pleasure" for him.

In his logic, these "facts" about the nature of femininity and masculinity create an

environment for the man to accidentally "take" his pleasure without consideration of

hers. He is implicitly stating that a culture of rape, or "taking" of pleasure without

considering others (or consent) is normal, because of the 'very nature' of femininity and

masculinity. Also implied as normal in his statement is that women don't enjoy sex and

that is why couples aren't "having sex every day". There is an implied blame placed on

the nature of femininity. Potentially in defense of the women, Caitlyn continues the

conversation by pointing to physiology and physicality of the cisgender female arousal

process:

> Caitlyn: And physiologically, it usually takes us (woman) longer to respond
>
> physically. And so putting us first allows for that ramp up period because I find
>
> that I get energized after I cum, whereas Michael tends to be relaxed and get
>
> sleepy afterwards. (Jameson, 2019a)

In this section I appreciate that Caitlyn is personalizing this experience by stating what is

true for her and her husband specifically, whereas the foundation of their episode is based

on generalizing what is true for ALL cisgender heterosexual monogamous couples.

However, talking about physiology is another code for essentialist/binary gendered

thinking, unless it is coming from a physiologist. Physiology is often used as evidence to

support or explain a generalization about something related to gender and sexuality. By

her logic, if women take "longer to respond physically" the only way to address this is to

put her orgasm first, otherwise the sexual encounter will be over before she is ready or

responsive to it. Which seems to point to illuding it is normal for the woman in a

heterosexual relationship to be a vessel or object for his pleasure to be "taken" from.

Further evidence of "her pleasure" existing only in relation to "his" is evidenced by

Caitlyn's explanation of experiencing her own orgasm first, allows the benefit of her

ability to solely focus on him:

> Caitlyn: I have more energy to help him get to his pleasure after I've cum and
>
> then after he's done, then we're both in a space where we can just go to sleep and
>
> I've already been taken care of, you know? (Jameson, 2019a)

This statement reinforces the male centric idea of sexuality and pleasure by implying that

the purpose of "she comes first" is actually so that she can better focus on pleasing her

male partner. In other words, let's get the woman's pleasure out of the way so that she

can provide pleasure for him. The social practice and narrative implied in this discussion

is that women are less sexual, and less important in the context of relationships. To

address this, you should "pretend" that women are important in the sexual encounter by

making them cum first. This reflects an idea that the pleasure of each partner is distinctly

separate and should be treated as such. The sole reward for the performative attention to

'her pleasure' is that it will directly the benefit the man by allowing her to focus solely on

his pleasure since hers is now "out of the way." This also assumes that a single orgasm is

all that is permitted or desired.

 There is no structural critique or understanding given in this conversation.

Generalizations and an elementary understanding of what it may mean to prioritize a

woman's pleasure are basically used to sell the product of the couples' book to the

listeners, though it seems they genuinely believe they developed a valuable answer to the

needs of cis/heterosexual couples.

In summary, if this couple, or any couple, is having sex every day because that is

what both partners want, then that is great. However, the reason this is happening could

be simple (well-matched desire) or more complex (a great deal of negotiating and

interrogation about their needs and desires, as well as commitment to understanding self

and other), but either way it is far more complex than a "natural side effect" from the fact

that they sleep naked. For listeners who felt included in the cisgender, heterosexual,

monogamous focus of this advice, there may be high stakes if such advice doesn't work

for their own relationship. The advice is presented at the individual level or relational

level, without a structural critique or understanding. If these three steps are the answer to

having sex every day and this doesn't help a listener, it could reinforce already existing

feelings of shame and internalized feelings that something is "wrong with me."

Advice via sexuality and relationship podcasts can often be packaged as universal

answers or a one-size-fits-all message with the assumed goal of what is normal or natural.

As previously explored, the use of terms such as "natural" is code for white, nondisabled,

cisgender, heterosexual positions. The myth of "natural" and "normal" is often a tool of

oppression and social control. Attributing physiology or what "is just natural" when

exploring issues of gender and sexuality is a theme in a sex-negative dominant culture

discourse. The following segment explores the discourse of one host who appears to feel

constrained by these categories yet continues to search for answers in understanding self

and relationships through achieving the goal of "natural" or "normal."

Desires to be Normal: Isn't This a "Natural" Feeling?

As previously discussed in Chapter 2, the myth of "natural" and "normal" is often a tool of oppression and social control as part of an essentialist world view that is tied to racist 'science' and eugenics. Despite this, dominant cultural narrative often employ essentialism as an unwavering fact and ideal. This is common in the cis/heteronormative podcast episodes and often goes unchallenged. In the section below, the speakers attempt to address the idea of what is "natural" and what is perhaps socialization of culture. The episode explored in this segment and the upcoming final segment varies from other episodes in that the interviewed guest does attempt to bring in a larger structural analysis to the conversation, however, his efforts to communicate this are often derailed by the hosts attempts to address biology. Consistent within other podcasts included in this Chapter 5, the host of the podcast explored here does not appear to have a larger understanding of sexuality and culture, and this deficit of knowledge once again perpetuates the dominant cultural norms that the speakers may be attempting to disrupt.

The podcast *I Do: Relationship Advice Podcast* is hosted by married couple Chase and Sarah Kosterlitz (Kosterlitz & Kosterlitz, 2019a). In the episode titled "Negotiating the Frequency of Sex," the guest interviewed is Dr. David Ludden. According to the introduction, Dr. Ludden has a Ph.D in cognitive psychology and a professor of psychology. The episode topic is introduced as being a common relationship concern for many couples, and Chase takes the lead in the interview:

> Chase: Today we're going to talk about a hotly contested subject, I'm sure for a lot of our listeners out there. I know Sarah and I have dealt with this, and that is how we can negotiate the frequency of sex in our relationships. So where is the best place to start on this hot topic? (Kosterlitz & Kosterlitz, 2019a)

Dr. Ludden begins the interview by introducing a review of a research study on couples

and sex in a very culturally-specific sample of Norwegian couples (Kosterlitz &

Kosterlitz, 2019a). He provides an outline of the research which was conducted by

Norwegian psychologists with a sample of (presumably cisgender heterosexual) couples

in committed relationships who were "very intelligent and well-educated couples living

in a modern industrial society where there's a very strong attitude of sexual equality"

(Kosterlitz & Kosterlitz, 2019a).   He provides a brief overview of findings and concludes

with this summary:

> Dr. Ludden: And so what they see is that in this in their sample at least, it seemed
>
> to be that that that the men were acquiescing to the level of frequency, or that the
>
> higher sex, higher sex drive partner was acquiescing to the frequency of the lower
>
> sex drive partner, which in most cases, was a male being the higher, [women being]
>
> in the lower [sex drive]. So that's sort of the background that I was reporting on my
>
> blog.
>
> Chase: So that's just it, right? It's in our natural biology of each partner. And you
>
> know, cultural conditioning comes into play, and we could talk about those, but
>
> let's just use the example one partner has a higher sex drive than the other. Probably
>
> pretty common. So how can those two partners begin a discussion of wanting to
>
> have more sex in the relationship? (Kosterlitz & Kosterlitz, 2019a)

The host uses the phrase "natural biology of each partner" in response to the binary

gender distinction of higher sex drive in men. Dr. Ludden attempted to rephrase his

summary by saying "the partner with the higher sex drive" and "which in most cases"

was the man. The host simultaneously dismisses and acknowledges the complexity of

cultural factors by saying "and we can talk about those (cultural factors), but…" first let's just talk about the biology of it. Dr. Ludden responds with an attempt to correct the direction of "biology" by providing more information on the factors that support couples in successfully negotiating frequency of sex:

> Dr. Ludden: Well, you see, that's the thing that the researchers find when they look, at an individual level. first of all, what they found was that actually the partners that they looked at were fairly well matched in terms of, of levels of sexual desire. And that, that they also found that the levels of sexual desire tended to be also related to open attitudes about sexuality, including discussing sexuality. So what we're really coming down to is the issue is that couples who do have sex frequently, are also talking about sex. They're actually openly negotiating the sexual frequency and the sexual acts, and at times which they're comfortable and engaging in these acts. But what the researchers suspect were happening with the couples who weren't having sex considerably as frequently is probably what was going on as these people weren't talking about it. Probably the higher sex drive partner was rebuffed a number of times and then just sort of gave up and let the lowers extract partners would take the lead in the relationship. So in essence, there's no negotiation that's going on in those particular cases (Kosterlitz & Kosterlitz, 2019a)

Dr. Ludden provides further clarification of the research findings by stating that the couples who engaged in frequent sex had both an open attitude about sexuality and were comfortable with talking opening and regularly about sex. He did not gender the partners in his statement, perhaps purposefully as an attempt to redirect the interview away from

"biology" and focus on the importance of communication and examination of sexual

attitudes. Initially, his attempts seem to work, in that the next four minutes of the

interview focus on communication and self-reflection:

> Dr. Ludden: other research shows that many couples do not talk about sex is
>
> something that I guess in our society, we have the attitude that sex is something you
>
> do You don't talk about, I think you need to a lot of things, I think you need to first
>
> of all you need to, to kind of examine your own attitudes about that. So you have to
>
> ask yourself if you're comfortable, regardless of whether you have the higher sex,
>
> or higher sex drive partner or the lower sex partner, you should be examining
>
> yourself… There are plenty of couples who do feel very open about talking about
>
> sex, and they're the ones who actually end up having more sex because they can,
>
> they can negotiate a compromise. It's this, that's happy for both of them (Kosterlitz
>
> & Kosterlitz, 2019a)

Most importantly in this quote, Dr. Ludden states that in "our society" has the attitude of

not talking about sex, and the importance of "examining your own attitudes about sex"

(Kosterlitz & Kosterlitz, 2019a). Dr. Ludden provides an example of someone with

perhaps a lot of complex knowledge trying to explain concepts to a person (in this case

Chase) who is only hearing the flatness of the issues. Dr. Ludden makes a very clear

point of stating that, according to the research he is referencing, the most important factor

in the couples being satisfied with the frequency of sex in their relationships are the

couple who are communicating about it – not their gender or biology, but their ability to

talk and communicate about their feelings and sex as a whole. Despite the efforts of the

guest to expand the host and listeners understanding, this question of biology often

derails an opportunity for deeper examination of the issue. The host is likely trying to

contribute a deeper conversation, and is perhaps unaware that his attention to biology is a

barrier in his understanding, or unaware of his conflation of biology and culture:

> Host Chase: Can you talk a little bit about the biology and the maybe cultural
>
> impact of our sexual desires? And maybe our expectations of the frequency?
>
> Dr. Ludden: Well, yeah, a lot of things are playing a role or playing into it. First of
>
> all, there's no such thing as a as a "normal frequency." That that should not ever
>
> come up. I read in a magazine somewhere that "the average couple has sex once a
>
> week, so you shouldn't ask me for more often than that", but you shouldn't even talk
>
> about that. I mean, certainly, we can do an average. We can ask people sexual
>
> frequencies and calculate that average. But then you're what you're doing is you're
>
> gathering together, all the numbers from people who don't have sex at all to people
>
> have sex multiple times a day, and then they have one time a week. doesn't say
>
> anything. You have to find a frequency that fits both of you…. (Kosterlitz &
>
> Kosterlitz, 2019a)

At this next opportunity to answer or challenge the question of biology, Dr. Ludden

attempts to challenge and provide education on ideas of "normal" and challenges the

question of "our expectations" by clearly stating that there is "no such thing as normal,

that should never come up [as an argument]" and provides some clarification around

what is meant by "average" in research. It seems that Dr. Ludden sees the way in which

the host is conflating "normal" and "average" and is attempting to dispel

misinterpretations and further conversation with all parties on the same page. He

continues below, and where in earlier parts of the interview has used words such cultural

or culture, he now inserts the word "social" in an attempt to better clarify for the host and

listeners:

> Dr. Ludden: (cont'd from above) ….typically, typically men having a higher sex
>
> drive than women, is partially for, I would say, for social reasons as they've been
>
> told they should be, you know, part of being a "real man" is being sexually active. I
>
> think part of the reason why women in our society have a lower sex drive or report
>
> a lower sex drive is because they've been taught that they shouldn't have a high sex
>
> drive. But we, we shame women who have high sex drives and are open about that.
>
> I think you know what I mean by that, right? [guest pauses for confirmation from
>
> host]
>
> Host Sarah: Yeah, yeah. (Kosterlitz & Kosterlitz, 2019a)

Sarah speaks up for the first time since the introduction segment of this episode and

confirms that yes, she understands the shaming of women and "social reasons" for binary

gendered ideas on sex.

Dr. Ludden seems relieved and continues to explain the impact of social factors;

> Dr. Ludden: Okay. Yeah. Okay. And so, the part of it has been taught, taught to
>
> them. It's not always the case that men have more sex drive the women. What I've
>
> heard from marriage counselors is that when they're dealing with clients – *and by*
>
> *the way, this is the number one issue that marriage counselors deal with really are*
>
> *pretty much propaganda.* They report that they were between a quarter and a third
>
> of the time is it's the woman who actually has a higher sex drive than the man. So
>
> we have to keep that in mind. There are multiple things that are going on.
>
> (emphasis mine) (Kosterlitz & Kosterlitz, 2019a)

When his attempts at discussing cultural and social issues in regard to the complexity of

sex frequency and relationships has previously not been understood, Dr. Ludden goes a

step further to drive home his point and uses the word "propaganda" to express the myths

that are taken as facts and often seen by couples' therapists as the primary compliant

upon intake.   He goes on to clearly outline and explain the way that culture can influence

sexuality and relationships by confusing the expectations of each partner. The host then

responds with:

> Host Chase: I'm glad you pointed out, you know, the cultural implications of
>
> what men and women are told. And obviously, our biology is at play too
>
> (Kosterlitz & Kosterlitz, 2019a)

Sigh. If academic writing allowed for the use of emojis this is where I would simply

place the "unimpressed face" emoji with the flat line for eyes and a mouth. After several

minutes of valuable, rich information and explanation from Dr. Ludden, the host seems to

not be able to speak of the social and cultural pieces without mentioning biology.

However, having heard some of this information before, Chase makes a connection to a

previous guest conversation and seems to be ready to talk more about culture and scripts

(continued from the quote above):

> Host Chase: I'm glad you pointed out, you know, the cultural implications of what
>
> men and women are told. And obviously, our biology is at play too. But we had a
>
> guest on [the podcast] who recently came out with a book *Untrue: Rethinking*
>
> *Female Sexuality*. She was on episode 204, but basically talking about how women
>
> have been told a certain narrative – as have men – based on movies and writing and
>
> articles online that aren't really reacting in the fact that most sex researchers are

were male, historically, that's changing. But anyways, you know, important things

to consider. (So, if you haven't our listeners, check that out, check out Episode

204). But it's so important to recognize, culturally, the narratives we're told, I think

it has such a huge impact on, you know, I can only speak as a as a man, like we're

supposed to be sexual, and you may not even want to have sex that much, but that's

what you're supposed to do. And you don't even think about it like that, because

we're so imprinted culturally with these ideas.

Dr. Ludden: That's right. And that's why you need to do some kind of self-

reflection. Reading, such as sources as you just mentioned, to help you understand

how these attitudes have been kind of programmed into you from, you know, from

a very early age, and that you don't actually have to follow the scripts that society is

given to you (Kosterlitz & Kosterlitz, 2019a)

While Chase stops short of identifying a specific example or vulnerable moment of his

own suffering under cultural scripts, he does acknowledge that this can be difficult for

people, including men. This is not the first or last time Dr. Ludden highlights the need for

self-reflection and understanding regarding the messages we may have internalized from

growing up in our culture. He seems to be attempting to disrupt the hosts replication of

essentialism by first offering up the evidence and then encouraging personal growth

work. The guest is balancing educating the host in an effort to try to educate the listeners

on the topic of the interview. Juggling the role of researcher and guest, with being an

educator/therapist to the host and challenging misinformation.

This section illustrates a nuanced example of sex-negative ideas despite a

commitment to sex positivity. For the host to respond to this long sequence of discourse

on culture, social factors, communication, and attitudes of sexuality with the statement

"and obviously, our biology is at play too" illustrates the depths of commitment that the

dominant culture has in this narrative, and the ways this commitment can prevent an

individual from hearing or applying information that might be beneficial for them.

Sometimes the use of "natural" or "biology" is used to explain the reasons for

existing dominant hierarchies, and sometimes it is used to for evidence as to why

someone should break free from the same hierarchies. For white cisgender, heterosexual

men, it can be like a "Choose your own adventure" book – he gets to decide which way

to go, he often gets to decide when to choose to listen to the rule. There is an underlying

whisper of "there's a right way and a wrong way to exist and I am right. Therefore, I can

decide when to challenge or replicate the existing structures."

For further evidence of "how things should be," the conversation of "evolution" is

common in the search for understanding and is the focus of the following segment. The

conversation with Chase and Dr. Ludden continues in this segment and develops into the

discussion of monogamy and the historical roots of relationship structures.

Evolution and Monogamy as the Ideal/Whitewashing History

Challenging monogamy as the ideal, without the shaming of those who chose to

be monogamous, could often be a sex-positive conversation. However, the segment

below provides an example of attempts at discussing cultural norms and expectations

without a structural critique that includes colonialism, capitalism and/or white

supremacy. The absence of this structural critique functions to maintain western, settler

colonial ideals, despite the desire to disrupt them, and prevents the discussion from

including historically subjugated knowledge which ultimately might provide some of the

answers the speakers, particularly the host, is struggling to explore.

In the same episode of the *I Do: Relationship Advice Podcast* explored above, the conversation between host Chase and guest Dr. Ludden moves from negotiating the frequency of sex in a relationship into discussing monogamy as the ideal relationship structure (Kosterlitz & Kosterlitz, 2019a). Chase moves from using the words natural and biology to now use the word "evolutionary."

> Host Chase: Do you have any interest or read any research in our evolutionary need for variety and multiple partners to perhaps keep the novelty in interest in a long-term relationship or monogamy?
>
> Dr. Ludden: Sure, sure. Ah, What, what you're getting, as we're asking the question of what sort of relationships, lifestyle that humans evolved to have versus what we have in contemporary society. And if we look at hunter gatherer societies, which is where we all came from originally, what we see is a mixture of short- and long-term relationships. You don't necessarily see lifelong monogamy. I mean, it does happen. Sometimes couples fall in love with each other and really do want to stay with each other for the rest of their lives. But we seem to have this attitude that lifelong monogamy is the natural relationship style for humans, and it's not. And we need to recognize that it's a culturally imposed relationship style. And if we want to make lifelong monogamy work, then we have to approach it as a kind of a lifelong project that we need to work on and not just assume that this is a natural style and we don't need to work on it (Kosterlitz & Kosterlitz, 2019a)

In response to the question about evolution and monogamy, the guest brings the conversation to hunter gatherer societies and the prevalence of both short and long-term relationships, noting that lifelong monogamy as the ideal relationship is a more

contemporary culturally imposed relationship style. The guest seems to understand the

host's use of discourse around "natural" and "evolution" and tries to explain to the host

and the audience that long term relationships need ongoing work, pushing against the

narrative that "this is natural and therefore should be easy". The implicit message that

something which is assumed to come naturally should not require work, is often

weaponized against the partner who is asking for something in a relationship, as in "no

I'm sorry, this should come naturally to me and if it doesn't then it is not meant to be".

Which also carries the notion that "your request/need is not valid."

In response to the question of "an evolutionary need" for multiple partners, in a

relationship, Dr. Ludden provides an alternative understanding for what "variety" can

mean. The conversation continues about evolution and relationship structures:

> Dr. Ludden: You mentioned the idea of variety. That's why you have talent. Variety
>
> within, within the things that you do in your relationship and, and, you know,
>
> adding different kind of kind of changes to your lifestyle, you know, weekend
>
> getaways and things like that where you can act differently from normal life, there
>
> is definitely going to be an issue of this, this need for variety (Kosterlitz &
>
> Kosterlitz, 2019a)

Variety within the relationship can consist of the individual interests and talents that are

brought to the relationship as well as the variety of experiences shared together.

However, the suggestion of a weekend getaway may not be an accessible option for many

couples. Dr. Ludden continues discussion of variety to include fantasy:

> Dr. Ludden: Now maybe also I want to add in that the issue of fantasy in our sex
>
> lives. Some people have the attitude, well, if you're not, if you're not thinking about

me while having sex, then then I don't want to be part of it. But you know, maybe

you should allow your partner to fantasize on occasion as opposed to having them

actually straying from you (Kosterlitz & Kosterlitz, 2019a)

The topic of fantasy is often an important and creative piece of an individual and/or

couple's sex life. By stating "maybe you should allow your partner to fantasize," he is

replicating and upholding the normative narrative that an individual's sexuality and

pleasure is somehow owned by their partner. He goes further to say "as opposed to

having them actually stray from you" which could imply a sort of emotional blackmail; if

you don't "let" me fantasize, then I will cheat. Or even could suggest that the only way

to be monogamous to is to fantasize about other people. The reality is that fantasy is an

important part of sexuality but discussing it in the context of a false dichotomy of choice

(fantasize or cheat) is not healthy or helpful in relational advice and certainly not

disrupting oppressive normativity.

Chase attempts to bring in a historical context for the construction of monogamy as

the ideal in relationship structures by pointing to hunter/gatherer societies and

connections to land rights:

Chase: And we have this format of monogamy that arose from farming and land

rights and now become 10,000 years later, from know the advent of farming more

or less, and we don't really question the modern evolution of it and like you said, a

lot of those monogamous pairings were actually serial monogamy and they're not

working. So, again, I'm not sitting here and saying that there's a better way

necessarily, but just to think about the other ways, or it could be as simple as being

okay with your partner fantasizing about another person, because in a lot of

monogamous relationships, that might be considered cheating, you might as well be

cheating if you're thinking about someone else. Right? (Kosterlitz & Kosterlitz,

2019a)

The motivation for this conversation appears to be based in a genuine desire for

relationships to be "better" and a curiosity of what this might consist of. There is an

implicit understanding that people in heterosexual relationships are struggling to

communicate and find common ground. This claim of a "modern evolution" suggests it

was a "natural" progression and completely omits an understanding of the purposeful

structural influences of colonization, capitalism, and white supremacy. Alternatively, the

conversation could have explicitly stated the connections of capitalism (implicit in land

ownership) and perhaps the host could have identified his anthropological considerations

are limited by a Eurocentric (or white) understanding. Providing examples of cultural

and systemic factors alongside individual factors and limitations could produce a rich

discussion and options for listeners to explore in their life and relationships. Therefore, an

exchange from this limited position will have missed opportunities for challenging the

status quo, to challenge normativity as opposed to replication. There is also no distinction

of the conversation occurring in the United States and the omission of any other possible

cultural influence communicates the assumption that everyone is like "us" or at the very

least, "we" have the best option currently available.

The conversation continues to discuss the assumptions that once a couple is in a

committed relationship there should be no attraction to anyone outside the relationship:

Dr. Ludden: Well, that's the attitude some people would have about it. It's this

attitude that once we get married, or once we're in a committed relationship, you

should want me and only me and not think about anybody else. But that's not going

to be the case. You're going to be attracted to other people, your partners can be

attracted to other people, you should simply be open about it. Just to suddenly

accept that aspect of us as humans that we are sexually attracted to multiple people

because that's the way we're designed. And what we're trying to do is work our

biology into a, a system that our society has set up. And that system really conflicts

with our biology a lot. So we really have to be open about it and think about ways

that we can accommodate our biological needs while also meeting the requirements

of our society.

Chase: I think just that realization is good. You're not preaching that people need to

be a certain way, but just enlighten yourself, you know, read a little bit more, it

might just make you feel better about yourself and not feeling guilty for desiring

another man, sexually outside of your husband because you see him and you're

attracted to him. I think we're taught that that's a that's a sinful thing. That's a bad

thing. [as in] 'Don't let your eyes wander' to these guys (Kosterlitz & Kosterlitz,

2019a)

The discussion of societal assumptions being at odds with what may just be "part of

being human" is meant to address the way that humans are capable of being attracted to

many people and being attracted to people does not mean acting on attraction. It is clear

by the statement "be open and think about ways that we can accommodate our biological

needs while also meeting the requirements of our society" this conversation confirms the

lack of critical analysis by not challenging or naming the requirements of the society. For

example, there is a missed opportunity to challenge the explicit message that the

relationship "owns" the sexuality or desire of those who are in it. It also seems

contradictory to make this statement since the guest began this episode pushing back on

the words "natural" or "biological needs." He appears to have made the choice to use the

language of the host perhaps in effort to be understood in the communication. As an

example, in the quote below, he appears to have chosen the word "natural" to reflect the

impact of socialization and cultural norms on an individual level:

> Dr Ludden: Yes, these attitudes that we have about how a marriage is supposed to
>
> be and how our sexuality supposed to be, really do lead people to experiencing high
>
> levels of guilt and feeling guilty about things that they have no control over and are
>
> quite natural.
>
> Chase: And do you see this changing? Because personally, obviously, Sarah and I
>
> are very involved in the relationship information world if you want to call it that,
>
> and it seems like there's a lot of podcasts and books being written about things like
>
> open marriage polyamory, and that information is being more widely distributed
>
> than ever. It's been around for a while, but and there's research, what are you seeing
>
> on your end? (Kosterlitz & Kosterlitz, 2019a)

Dr. Ludden identifies that cultural attitudes and assumptions about marriage and sexuality

can lead people to experience high levels of guilt. In other words, dominant cultural

narratives and assumptions provide rigid guidelines for acceptable relationships and

experiences, which in turn creates an "ideal" that individuals may strive to achieve. Any

difficulty with meeting these norms can create distress and feelings of guilt that they have

failed, or something is wrong with them on an individual level, as opposed to challenging

the norm itself. He is implicitly talking about heterosexual couples since there is no

mention of any alternative options for relationships.

Chase states that he and his wife are "very involved in the relationship

information world" and are seeing trends that are turning toward what has historically

been considered subcultures or countercultures or nonmonogamy or polyamory being

present in more mainstream conversations. Once again, the lack of the larger structural

critique has prevented Chase from knowing these topics are not new, and by saying "it's

becoming more widely distributed than ever," he is implicitly saying that these topics

have just begun to be talked about in cisgender heterosexual and white circles. Dr.

Ludden notes that many people may be changing their sexual attitudes and looking for

information on how to make their relationships better, and he alludes to the fact that

information has always been out there, but often people aren't aware of it:

> Dr Ludden: Yeah, there's a lot of information out there. But the people have to
>
> access the information. If you have very strong inhibitions about sexuality, then you
>
> may not even be looking for that information online, the people were looking for
>
> that information are the ones who are recognizing that there's something not quite
>
> right in their lives or their relationships and want to get more information about
>
> how to make it better. So certainly a lot more information about [that is] out there.
>
> Chase: We do see a change what's going on here in terms of sexual attitudes, but
>
> slow, are we evolving into where we evolved from?
>
> Dr. Ludden: See, I wouldn't use the word evolve and this case is certainly not, it's
>
> not natural selection that's happening. What I think is happening is, is that we are

going back to our natural sexual state. I think that's what you're trying to get at

(Kosterlitz & Kosterlitz, 2019a)

The statement that "we are going back to our natural state" is again confusing for him to

use this language that he seems to reject earlier in the conversation, but perhaps he is

subverting the meaning and using "natural" against culturally imposed ideas.

Unfortunately, without first fully providing a conceptual analysis or exploring the

connotations of "natural," this possible attempt to subvert falls short and may just

reinforce the host or listener's essentialist ideas. This segment of conversation feels

relatable to the searches preformed in the data collection of this research and the lack of

variety in the initial "popular" results, as Dr. Ludden illudes, people may not even be

looking to access the information unless they already have a sense that perhaps

"something is wrong" in their relationships:

> Dr. Ludden: While we were an agricultural society and everybody was tied to the
>
> land, lifelong monogamy was necessary in order to keep you know, property rights
>
> and so on together, you needed to have that sort of stability. And by the way, we've
>
> shown also kind of keep this in mind because even streaming today is that when
>
> we're talking about marriage, in the kind of a marriage that you that developed in
>
> agricultural societies, we're really talking about economic arrangement. And that's
>
> really what it was. And actually what it still is today, marriage is still an economic
>
> arrangement. You get all sorts of tax breaks, you record your taxes as a couple, but
>
> only if you're married. If you're cohabiting, even if you've been cohabitating for
>
> years but you're not married, you're going to be reporting your taxes separately.

> You're not going to be getting tax breaks, and so on for being married, so it is still
>
> an economic relationship (Kosterlitz & Kosterlitz, 2019a)

While Dr. Ludden does make the connection the economic arrangement of land

ownership and marriage, these conversations and attempts at analyzing the cultural

influences do not include the largest cultural connections to economics in the western

world – colonialism and capitalism and white supremacy. In fact, there is even an

absence of naming the conversation is occurring from a position within a western context.

In this context, it could be better addressed by simply stating something like "not all

societies are agricultural societies, and we can see the development of different relational

and familial structures outside of economic arrangement," or "in our US culture marriage

is an economic arrangement that provides access for some and excludes others." Often

even the naming of the structures can shift a concept to open dialogue for deeper

understanding. These structures remain invisible in this conversation, despite what feels

like a genuine attempt at having a larger analysis when seeking to understand the

influences that impact individuals. Unfortunately, Chase does not engage with this

discussion of economics and instead goes back to biology, deciding to then divert the

conversation to nutrition and paleo diets:

> Chase: I think the intersection of culture and biology is fascinating not just in
>
> sexuality, but in nutrition and, and we'll have to have you back on and we could just
>
> dedicate a whole show to talking about our evolution of sexuality and culture, I
>
> think it's really interesting. We'll have to do that. Last thing before we wrap up is
>
> related to that is, is you mentioned going back to rather than evolving to, you see
>
> that with like the Paleo diet, And basically, we're realizing we need to get away

from the processed foods and, and get back to the way we evolve to eat and that has

a lot of I'm not saying paleo, but just eating things that grow from the ground and

walk or swim, you know, right foods, and that has good health benefits because

that's where we evolved from. It's a little bit harder with relationships and

sexuality figuring out exactly what was going on. But with research that you're

doing and others, we are getting a better idea of what works and doesn't work and

then looking to the past, and then forming a better way forward is really what we

want to be doing (Kosterlitz & Kosterlitz, 2019a)

Chase reflects a general confusion and desire to understand that he sees as common in the

"relationship advice world." He names the need to "figure out what's going on" and to

"get a better idea of what works" can be assisted by "looking to the past" in order to learn

how to best move forward. Unfortunately, the lack of sufficient sex education is not the

only area of early education that continues to be inaccurate and incomplete. The general

public does not receive an accurate historical account of US or world history, as was

discussed in Chapter 2. In many ways, this conversation sounds like a deeply

whitewashed and inaccurate attempt of flirting with something adjacent to

decolonization. In other words, it seems that Chase may have some intuitive idea that

there is knowledge to be found in "what once was," or perhaps what is different from

what he knows. However, he seems to have no concept of the structures of whiteness that

cloud and limit his understanding and assessment of history, which is ultimately

supported by the lack of an accurate historical accounts that is the practice of the US

education system. The result of the general lack of education functions to maintain

existing power structures, even at the individual and relational sphere of experience.

Conclusion

In this Chapter 5 of findings, sexual and relational advice is often constrained by dominant cultural narratives and underlying assumptions of essentialism which encourage listeners to better adjust to norms. It is easy to extrapolate from these episodes that being at the top of the hierarchy does not necessarily come with wisdom and knowledge necessary to understand oneself and negotiate healthy relationships. While it may seem obvious that all humans go through a process of understanding themselves and their relationships, it is a normative assumption that an answer does in fact exist within the framework that such questions are provided, as opposed to their being valuable information outside dominant cultural narratives. In these discussions of "natural" and "evolution" I sense the struggle and the underlying desire for change or escape from the constraints they are beginning to name as being culturally placed upon them. While this tension is implicit throughout the episodes, the statements by Dr. Ludden are the only explicit attempts to name structural influences and understandings about culture. However, as illustrated in the segments provided, Dr. Ludden's attempts were not met with any significant understanding or engagement in the discussion.

The implicit question of how we might do things better provides a smooth transition into the final chapter of findings in this research which illustrates the conversations and discourse which include a strong critical understanding and structural analysis.

Chapter 6: Discourse Containing Structural and Power Analysis

In the previous findings chapters, I began with presenting information on the lack

of comprehensive sex education and the sex-negative cultural messages that can be

replicated and internalized as a result. I presented several detailed examples of discourse

that lack any critical or structural analysis. These examples perpetuate dominant cultural

norms which are inherently unhealthy, harmful and provide further evidence of discourse

that perpetuates systems of oppressions. This is particularly true when there is no

intentional naming or understanding of these systems and an accompanying structural or

power analysis. In contrast, the episodes explored in this Chapter 6 are unequivocally

critical and sex-positive. While the discourse in Chapter 5 perpetuates

cis/heteronormativity as a standard for health, the discourse in this Chapter 6 challenges

implicit notions of health and normativity, offering discourse to assist the audience in

deeper connection to self, others, and overall wellbeing. A major distinction in upcoming

podcast episodes included here is that they contain an explicit critical structural analysis

in the discourse. This chapter begins with information on the background of the podcasts.

Overview and Background of Chapter 6 Data

The podcasts and episodes presented in this chapter are *American Sex* hosted by

Sunny Megatron and Ken Melvoin-Berg with guest @sexologybae (Megatron &

Melvoin-Berg, 2019), *Disability After Dark* hosted by Andrew Gurza (Gurza 2019a,

2019b), *Queer Sex Ed* hosted by Sara Connell and Jay Botsford (Connell & Botsford

2019a, 2019b), *Trauma Queen* hosted by Jimanekia Eborn with guest Ericka Hart (Eborn,

2019) and *Sexology with Dr. Moali* hosted by Dr. Nazanin Moali (Moali 2019a, 2019b)

with guest Dalychia Saah, co-founder of Afrosexology (Moali, 2019a).

For the podcasts in this chapter, the taglines and descriptions are reflective of the

hosts position such as *American Sex* "Sex educators, pleasure advocates, and kinky pervs,

too" (Megatron & Melvoin-Berg, 2019). This example provides the listeners with explicit

information about the position of the hosts and the experiences they are speaking from,

such as being kinky sex educators and pleasure advocates. This is very different from

those in the previous chapter. While a podcast tagline or summary of description is

helpful in marketing towards an intended audience, the podcasts in this chapter do not

have the same exploitive tone of marketing a promise or universal position of authority to

the audience as the podcasts in Chapter 5 such as "have better sex tonight" or "America's

#1 Marriage, Family and Parenting Expert" (Jameson, 2019a; Schlessinger, 2019a). In

this chapter, the taglines seem less about selling something to the audience and more

about providing the position or objective of the podcast such as *Disability After Dark* as

"shining a bright light on sex and disability" (Gurza, 2019a), *Sexology with Dr. Moali*

"sexuality and pleasure from a scientific perspective" (Moali, 2019a) and *Queer Sex Ed*

"pleasure is a basic human right" (Connell & Botsford, 2019a). Prior to any analysis of

the content in these episodes, the exploration of the background of the data

communicated a sense of a collective process such as the example of the tagline for

Trauma Queen which of "Let's heal together" (Eborn, 2019). *Queer Sex Ed* includes a

statement that the information contained is not meant to be a medical or professional

sexual health resource. Ironically, the information they (and the other speakers in this

chapter) provide is far more comprehensive and factual than that which is provided by

those in Chapter 5 who claim universal expert status (and in some cases have professional

clinical licensure).

In exploring the websites for these podcasts there are clear statements about the qualifications, professional experience and personal positionality of the hosts. All of the podcasts in this chapter include hosts who identify as sex educators, with the exception of Dr. Moali who identifies her post-doctoral training in sexual health, and they all provide extensive information to back up such claim. In contrast to the previous chapter where host and guest information is extremely limited, the podcasts in this chapter provide introductions that include background on their professional and personal experiences specific to sex and sexuality including current and past accolades and professional organizations they are connected to. The speakers in this chapter also offer clear statements of positionality regarding pronouns and gender identity, sexuality, race, disability status and often class or socioeconomic background. The inclusion of these statements provides the audience with context for the information presented and why the experiences or knowledge of the speakers may have value for the listener. However, despite the specific positionality that the host or guests are identifying, the information they convey does not feel exclusionary to those outside their positionality. This is evident throughout the findings presented in this chapter.

In high contrast to the podcast episodes included in Chapter 5, the podcasts in this chapter are aligned with the three priorities of Critical Sexuality Studies outlined in previous chapters (Fahs & McClelland, 2016). The practice of ongoing conceptual analysis and challenging of heterosexual privilege is present and woven throughout these episodes. The discourse in these episodes give specific attention to abject bodies such as disabled bodies, fat bodies, chronically ill bodies, including those struggling with mental

health. Detailed examples of this framework are illustrated throughout this upcoming

chapter.

This chapter expands on several shared components found in these podcasts

episodes which include anti oppression strategies such as the modeling of ongoing

consent and accountability on the part of the speakers to their stated values, transparency

and shared power. This is seen through clear modeling and statements of commitments to

the listeners which are followed up with opportunities for listeners to push back on any

areas of concern. These accountability strategies are illustrated in the subsection of anti-

oppressive strategies and further explored in relation to the legacy of harm.

Additionally, the permanently self-reflective nature of these episodes is another

factor and a notable difference from the sex-negative discourse presented in the previous

chapter. Therefore, this chapter illustrates the alternative, more expansive possibilities of

sexuality discourse that is sex-positive, challenges systemic oppression, and values a

collective liberation from such systems. In doing so, these podcasts provide applicable

sex education and relationship support that is valuable and relevant to any audience.

These episodes contain power analyses which interrupt patterns of oppression and

invisible normativity through several mechanisms that function to challenge

cis/heteronormativity and the systems of oppression they carry.

This chapter begins with a conceptual analysis of collective liberation from systems

of oppression, and the anti-oppressive strategies that are shared across these podcasts.

Conceptual Analysis: Liberation

The podcasts included in this chapter emphasize efforts to disrupt and dismantle

systems of oppression and liberation. Sara Connell and Jay Botsford, the hosts of the

Queer Sex Ed podcast, provide comprehensive information and education to listeners that

prioritizes queer and trans experiences on topics related to sexual health (Connell &

Botsford, 2019b). Sara and Jay both identify themselves as white, queer, kinky and part

of the trans community. The hosts provide exceptional examples of infusing critical and

structural analysis into the education they provide, and therefore a number of sections

from this podcast are presented in this chapter.

In this first segment, the hosts provide a conceptual analysis of trans liberation and

the interconnections of oppressive systems from the larger structural context to the

individual impact:

> So trans liberation means that we're looking at our current or future society, in a
>
> world where all people, and particularly those most impacted by trans misogyny,
>
> colonialism, white supremacy, and all the other systems of oppression...are free to
>
> explore gender expression, body modifications and self-identity, without violence,
>
> without shame, without repression, without nonconsensual assigned sex or gender
>
> or preferences. And it also means full bodily autonomy from birth to death,
>
> freedom from eugenics, freedom from reproductive coercion, freedom from state
>
> violence. (Connell & Botsford, 2019b)

While the quote above is specifically addressing trans liberation, the conceptualization

includes people of all genders but understanding that "particularly those most impacted

by trans misogyny" are at the highest risk for harm and impacted most. Liberation is not

exclusionary. The work towards a collective liberation includes a vision of a world where

all people are free from coercion and violence. Beyond the removal of harm and attempts

at inclusion is the celebration of diversity, or positions that are historically marginalized:

And then even beyond that, how do we create futures that celebrate transgender,

gender queer, gender fluid, nonbinary, two spirit and other groups that we can't

even name or imagine right now? Because our current world relies on defining

gender in relationship to binary system or norms for sex, for gender for gender

expression and for bodies, so even the very concept of being transgender itself is

built on the idea that you are transgender-"ing" from something right? (Connell &

Botsford, 2019b)

The hosts speak to the assumptions and power that are built into our language and

understanding, using the example of "transgender-ing from the status quo" as is part of

why it can be hard to accurately express and talk about these things. Our language is

limiting, binary, gendered, and systems of oppression are embedded within it. Jay goes

on to expand on the limitations of language and the categories that are mitigated through

the lens of cisgenderism:

Jay: So kind of the problem with language. And the problem with definitions is

right is like our definitional system is built on things in relation to other things.

It's very hard to define something in a vacuum without any other cultural context.

And so we can envision a world where trans people are fully supported, but it

might mean something completely different than we can even envision right now

because it might mean a world that isn't mitigated through the lens of cisgender

people, right? Where our idea of bodies aren't men, women and different from

that, like meaning cis men and cis women. But that's the way that a lot of our

categories are built. (Connell & Botsford, 2019a)

This quote outlines the complexity of the way our language is intertwined with the cultural context. The lens of language is currently mitigated through cisgenderism which is connected to the other systems of oppression that organize the literal structure of our society. Jay continues to discuss this structure and the interconnectedness of systems of oppression, highlighting that liberation and justice must include all groups of people:

> Jay: Yeah, because for this world to achieve any liberation for some group, we have to have liberation for all groups, or it's not liberation. Like Sara said in a previous episode, "there's not a midpoint between liberation and white supremacy".
>
> There's not a midpoint between liberation and sexism and trans misogyny. There's not a spectrum here. Like it's all the bullshit until we're actually at the justice and liberation point. And so a world in which we have achieved trans liberation, when that's truly realized, is also going to be a future that has acknowledged and repaired the harms and the legacy of slavery, colonialism, genocide, mass incarceration, poverty, Ableism, white supremacy, all of which are ongoing, because we have to actually fix those harms, and up root all of those systems, because they have structured our society as it exists now. (Connell & Botsford, 2019b)

There is no halfway point between liberation and white supremacy. In this previous segment, and throughout the episodes included in this chapter, the hosts and guests provide exceptional examples of disruption and challenging of oppressive normativity that always include attention to larger structures of white supremacy culture and capitalism. By continuously naming and speaking truth to power, the hosts connect the ways that these systems of oppression infuse everything in our society from the meta to micro level, which is the basis of this research and was outlined in Chapters 1 and 2.

This commitment to liberation is explicitly and implicitly carried throughout the podcasts in this chapter as opposed to the podcasts in Chapter 5.

Beyond the vital practice of conceptual analysis which speaks truth to power, making the implicit explicit for listeners, the anti-oppressive strategies present in these episodes are put into practice and illustrated in the framework of the podcasts themselves. In addition to attention to abject bodies and challenging heterosexual privilege, the following section includes several strategies that tend to power and power shifts, including active and ongoing consent, accountability, and self-reflection.

Anti-oppressive Strategies

This section provides examples of discourse which challenges power structures through several anti-oppressive strategies which speak to invisible and underlying assumptions and shift power dynamics. Five anti-oppressive strategies that are present in the structure of these podcasts are presented below; the modeling of consent and agency; accountability and shared power; centering historically marginalized knowledge; ongoing self-reflection; and the structural analysis of power. These strategies relate to one another in that they simultaneously challenge the norms of dominant cultural narratives and provide a framework for addressing the impact of those narratives on the individual and relational levels.

Consent and Agency

In dominant cultural discourse, the concept of consent is generally only present or prioritized in explicit conversations of rape or sexual assault. In the previous Chapter 4, there were several examples of how insufficient sex ed had left people feeling ill-prepared for navigating relationships and prevented the development of skills, including how to operationalize consent. In contrast, the examples below illustrate how consent can

not only be discussed but also modeled through being incorporated into the structure of

the sex-positive podcasts by providing informative introductions and context which are

carried throughout the episode.

An example of consent in the framework of the podcast comes from the

introduction of *Trauma Queen*:

Hey, this is a quick content warning to let you know that we may be discussing

some pretty hard things, or we may even bring up some pretty intense emotions. If

this is affecting you, Take a breath take a walk. Skip this episode, it's okay, do

whatever you need to do for you. We will be here whenever you're ready to come

back (Eborn, 2019)

Acknowledgement of difficult topics and permission to decide if this is the right time for

listening is coupled with encouraging self-care and reassurance that "we will be here

when you're ready" (Eborn, 2019). This allows for informed consent and agency on the

part of the listener without shame. This is similar to other examples such as:

It's okay if you decide this isn't the right time for these conversations (Connell &

Botsford, 2019a)

By explicitly stating "it is ok if you decide this isn't the right time for these

conversations" the hosts are inviting consent and agency from the listeners to make

decisions that are best for them. The implicit message here is that although the podcast is

providing information and conversation about sexual health, the hosts are not the

authority on what is right is for the listener. And what is right for a listener at any given

moment may change. This explicit acknowledgement identifies the power differential of

host/listener or expert/listener and attempts to provide balance and permission of choice.

Informed consent means having accurate information so that an informed decision can be made. Building upon the introductory permission that 'this may not be the right time' for these discussions, the hosts integrate consent throughout the episode by providing a "heads up" for listeners as to the content that is coming up:

> For our last question, I do want to give a content warning that we're going to be talking really explicitly about fatphobia, and how that shows up. Given that we're talking about this, it can activate a lot of stuff around eating and other internalized stuff (Connell & Botsford, 2019a)

> So content note right now I am about to talk about the death of a loved one (Megatron & Melvoin-Berg, 2019)

By providing a content warning, the hosts carry the commitment to consent by acknowledging the listener has the right to choose if they are ready or able to listen to a specific topic. Another example of this occurs in the episode of *Queer Sex Ed* titled "Q&A," which includes five listener questions and detailed answers from the hosts. Before reading each question, the hosts acknowledge it may be difficult for listeners make a statements to provide an easy option for skipping the upcoming section. Two such examples follow:

> This question discusses family rejection and sexual shame. to skip this conversation, Skip to 32 minutes and 50 seconds in the podcast (Connell & Botsford, 2019a)

> This question deals with sexual objectification and racism (Connell & Botsford, 2019a)

> To skip this discussion. Go to 45 minutes and 55 seconds in the podcast (Connell &
>
> Botsford, 2019a)

Providing the time stamps creates an easy option for listeners to skip the upcoming

content and explicitly gives the listener permission to do so. These examples illustrate

consent is an ongoing process and the listener has agency and choice throughout. When a

listener clicks on a podcast, there is an assumed consent being given, however these hosts

understand that consent is ongoing, and the experience of listeners is nuanced. A listener

may be ready to listen to a podcast on sexual health but not in a state of mind for explicit

discussion of fatphobia, for example, if they are also managing fatphobia in their lives.

This attention to ongoing consent, permission to remove consent, and agency in the

process is a stark difference from dominant cultural norms and narratives that can easily

be seen in whatever high-profile rape case is in the news today. These hosts illustrate that

conversations and practice of consent can, and should, occur in all areas of life.

In addition to ongoing consent, the hosts provide options for further information

and support related to the topic at hand. These resources were often provided within the

discourse, and also noted that resources are available on the podcast's websites. These

resources were not tied to financial gain for the host or the guest, providing another

tangible difference to this structure. There is absence of financial investment as the single

motivation in the information provided, versus the message that as an expert you must

come to me for the answers. This is an added layer of consent and agency for the listener

by communicating that this information can be verified and explored outside of what the

host is providing. This shared power is also communicated through accountability and

transparency on the part of the host or guests.

Accountability and Shared Power

By prioritizing and integrating informed consent and agency in the discussion, the hosts of these podcasts are also acknowledging a commitment to shared power and their accountability for the information they are dispersing to the listener. The hosts of *Queer Sex Ed* provide an example of this accountability through the use of what they call an "Accountability Corner" segment which they include on their website and in the introduction or framing of their episodes:

> So just wanted to remind people, we do an accountability corner segment at the beginning of the show, just in case anything we've said in the past, either like we got something wrong, like in our privilege, because as white folks or with other types of privilege, we are going to make mistakes as well. So we want people to call us in on that and help educate us if possible. If not, we'll do our own education and bring it to the show. We did that a little while ago about someone who let us know that bad dragon toys, for example, had said some really transphobic stuff in the past and we didn't know when we recommended them. So they're going to be times like that, where we're just going to miss something. We're online, but we're not everywhere. So if there's something you feel like we missed, send in an email and we'll add that to the accountability corner to the best of our abilities (Connell & Botsford, 2019a)

Clearly stating they are open to feedback and questions suggests these hosts are not under the illusion that they are the final authority on the information shared. They are challenging the binary position of "expert" and "listener" and note that from a privileged position mistakes will be made. Modeling openness and offering a tangible example of accountability also shifts power.

However, the hosts are clear about who they are accountable to by explicitly

welcoming feedback or comments "to help us better understand the experiences of

marginalized identities" (Connell & Botsford, 2019a). There is an intentional decentering

of feedback that is based in the experience of historically privileged identities, such as

cisgender and heterosexual listeners, which in and of itself is subverting power dynamics

by communicating "this is not your place". They are effectively and explicitly

decentering the dominant cultural narrative or identities and challenging oppressive

normativity. This is carried through in the following segment which provides an example

of naming the intended audience of the podcast and valuing subjugated knowledge.

Centering Historically Marginalized Knowledge

The hosts of *Queer Sex Ed* provide a rich example for how to be intentional and

transparent about who an intended audience is and that they are centering queer and trans

voice and experiences. This functions not only as an acknowledgement to their queer and

trans listeners, but also as a boundary for any cis/het listeners, and for all listeners who

may be white:

> Jay: As a reminder, we are also not here to be a trans or queer 101 podcast. So just
>
> as we are going to ensure that the conversations we are having are talking about all
>
> of the systems that really structure sex, relationships, sexuality and the ways that
>
> we relate to each other. We are not going to spend time talking about basics of
>
> LGBT communities or identities (Connell & Botsford, 2019a)

In addition to identifying who the intended audience is, they are clarifying expectations

by stating this is not introductory level information. This sets the expectation that allows

them to take deep dives into the topics that come up without the labor of having to start at

a 101-Level every time. They are specific in naming the importance of discussing the

systems that structure sex, sexuality, and relationships. Often when a conversation is centered around the experience or knowledge of marginalized community, there is a great deal of labor that has to go towards explaining or providing basic information to the dominant culture or those with privileged identities, such as cisgender and heterosexual. The hosts are creating a boundary and clarifying expectations for all listeners. The hosts are intentional in directing a message towards listeners who are not part of the intended audience:

> Jay: We are centering queer and trans and polyamorous and kinky people in this podcast, which means we're talking [directly] to queer and trans people.
>
> Sara: Yeah, definitely. And that doesn't mean you [as a non queer or trans listener] might not learn something from it. In fact, a lot of cisgender people I know have told me, "I had no idea about X, Y, or Z until you and Jay talked about it on the podcast," or "I had never thought about transness in this specific way until I heard that segment that you were talking about it" or "you know, I never thought about queerness being attacked in this specific way. But that episode you did about police brutality was really fascinating to me and made me understand that the queer movement is also an anti-police state and anti-incarceration" and all this kind stuff that's just going to come from the fact that Jay and I are queer, trans, kinky, polyamorous people, and we're just talking about our lives, our experiences, what we find interesting what we do in our lives, and that in and of itself is informative to you (Connell & Botsford, 2019a)

By providing their positionally and audience for the podcast, they are shifting and challenging the dominant cultural norm of centering cisgender, heterosexual,

monogamous voices and experiences. Quite often, people with marginalized identities or

social locations are forced to tailor their expression or experience to the

majority/dominant norm level of (limited) understanding. This requires extensive

emotional, intellectual and often physical labor from individuals or groups who are

already doing the extra labor that is required to survive through navigating systems of

oppression. In the above statement they are saying this is what we are doing, we aren't

going to catch you up with some 101-level information, find that somewhere else and do

your own work. Very often conversations from a marginalized perspective or experience

can be hijacked by privileged perspectives who require "catching up" or explanations

often which are not about better understanding but about determining validity. But what

they are also doing is speaking directly to the person who may embody the dominant

norm and saying this space is not made for you, please respect that, but despite this fact,

this is valuable for you, and you will learn something (as evidenced by other cis people's

experiences). The focus of an intended queer and trans audience does not mean that

others are excluded, it means they are not the focus of the information. This is a subtle

and powerful distinction that can be seen between the discourse in Chapter 5 and that

within this Chapter 6. When the discourse occurs without a structural or power analysis

and there is an assumed universal position of cisgender and heterosexual, the

conversations are highly exclusionary. However, when a structural analysis is present the

discourse is applicable and helpful even for those outside the intended audience.

They continue with a valuable and direct message to any person or listener with privilege:

> And so if you're a person with privilege- if you're cisgender person and , if you're a
>
> white person who's listening to this, you're struggling to understand something, be

grateful that you're being educated about things that might be outside of your scope

and understand that you might not get all of it yet. And that's okay. Our goal with

this show isn't to give you all the answers. It's to give you a window into the

conversations that Jay and I have and what we think about certain topics in sex ed

and adjacent fields. (Connell & Botsford, 2019a)

Be grateful. This is a privilege to be witnessing information and experiences outside of

your own. This position challenges the dominant cultural assumptions of "superiority" of

majority over so called/assumed minority, particularly regarding white privilege:

And so if you're a white person, and you hear something where you're like, wow, I

don't really think this is about race, or why are they bringing this up right now?

Why are they talking about labor organizing? Why are they talking about racism?

Why are they talking about classism, or whatever else, right? And it's because all of

that stuff is linked to freedom, justice and sexuality. And so if you see something

that's about racism, and you're a white person, and you go 'What does race have to

do with this?' I want you to take a minute and reframe that question and say, 'What

about this am I not understanding and how can I learn more about how race infuses

this topic?' because the reality is that it infuses almost everything in the United

States. And so if you're missing something, if you feel like something isn't about

race or isn't about class or isn't about disability or whatever else, you're missing

something, it's not that that thing isn't about it, it's that you and your own privileged

understanding of the world might be lacking a wider understanding. (Connell &

Botsford, 2019a)

This statement is powerful and important. This puts the labor back onto the privileged position who does not understand something and leaves no room for invalidating or arguments of "truth." These connections exist despite a privileged person's limited understanding. The hosts are calling for privileged listeners to do their own work, reframe the situation and mindset from "what does race [as one example] have to do with this?" which requires outside explanation, to "what am I not understanding here and how can I learn more?" More often than not, the mindset of privilege includes this entitlement towards having an explanation given to them, requesting "proof" versus the mindset that "perhaps I am not clear on something" and should explore this through my own labor.

Creating this boundary and shared understanding that privilege positions lack a wider understanding is not just for the listeners and is not binary. Individuals can hold multiple positions of privilege and oppression that require ongoing self-reflection and knowledge of positionality. This concept of ongoing self-reflection is present throughout the podcasts. Acknowledging privileges also means understanding how you benefit from systems of oppression, in addition to how a privileged position creates with a limited understanding.

Reflections on Positionality

In the *American Sex* episode with @SexologyBae (Alex), she reflects on her own positions and the challenges that come with privileged positions:

> Alex: I think it's so hard, because I think in general, it's really hard for those of us that have oppressed identities to acknowledge the ways that we benefit from and by extension, replicate oppression.

> And I will be the first one to acknowledge it is incredibly hard for me, again, as a
>
> Black woman, you know, that in and of itself is a very oppressed identity.
>
> However, you know, I do have some level of class privilege, I have a comfortable
>
> job that provides me with health insurance. I live in a two-income household, you
>
> know, my needs are met, beyond, you know, everything that I really 'need.' And I
>
> have a college education, I'm pursuing higher education, you know, things like
>
> that, and so, it's very easy to look at yourself and say, Okay, well, I suffer these
>
> ways, but [its harder to say] How do I replicate things? (Megatron & Melvoin-
>
> Berg, 2019)

Alex acknowledges that for many people who hold both positions of privilege and

oppression, it can be easier to acknowledge and understand the positions of oppression.

Acknowledging where we benefit and that those positions of privilege are often

inherently going to be replicating oppression again places the work on the positions of

privilege within each person.

> In the same conversation, Alex acknowledges areas where she has struggled and

how this is an ongoing process:

> Alex: It's not an overnight process and I make mistakes too
>
> especially when it came to working through my own transphobia for example, and
>
> things like, that as I came into my own consciousness.
>
> Ken (co-host): It is hard; and I still am racist because I benefit from institutional
>
> racism (Megatron & Melvoin-Berg, 2019)

Alex and co-host Ken both acknowledge the position of privilege they hold that requires

ongoing work. In this example, Alex acknowledges that institutional cisgenderism

requires her attention to dismantling of transphobia, and Ken acknowledges institutional

racism requires his attention to dismantling racism. Infusing evidence of personal

reflection in difficult conversations provides modeling of transparency and accountability

and examples for listeners to better conceptualize and understand nuances. Additionally,

and perhaps more importantly, this communicates the ongoing process that has no end

point, no hierarchy of universal expert and listener.

Structural Analysis of Power

Experiencing harm from the systems of oppression does not prevent an individual

from perpetuating oppression or harm. As Jay and Sara, the hosts of *Queer Sex Ed*

highlight in this segment, everyone has internalized some level of the systems of

oppression that permeate our culture:

> Sara: I think that there's also this tendency to believe that if we create spaces that
>
> exclude cis straight men, then we have removed sexism, misogyny, anti-trans, anti-
>
> queer antagonism, white supremacy and racism, misogyny and war and all these
>
> other things. And the reality is we haven't.
>
> And then people tend to operate in the spaces as though those things aren't here,
>
> because we got rid of the cis het men.
>
> But just by removing the folks who are kind of the most privileged in a lot of these
>
> systems, doesn't remove the system, because it's not just them perpetuating it
>
> constantly. Because we inhabit the system and the   system inhabits us so it is
>
> inside us. It is internalized. Unless we are consciously constantly fighting against
>
> the defaults that we've been set to, we are going to act in oppressive harmful ways.
>
> With or without intention (Connell & Botsford, 2019a)

This quote acknowledges an individual versus structural understanding of oppression. This is an acknowledgement that despite who is in the room, the room is still operating the dominant cultural norms. Therefore, commitment to working against oppression requires two important things: 1) An ongoing commitment to the individual work or examine and dismantling the ways we each have benefits and internalized these systems and 2) Addressing the system "defaults" in an effort to help change the system. System defaults of colonialism and capitalism (or exploitation of bodies for profit) along with white supremacy are embedded within cis/heteronormativity and other system defaults of racism, classism and ableism. For example, Chapter 5 highlighted discourse that did not have a commitment to working against oppression and therefore system defaults went unaddressed, and thus perpetuate oppression. This discourse in this chapter hold an anti-oppression commitment and model ongoing attention to addressing the system defaults.

The following section further explores the system defaults as they relate to pleasure. Building upon the previous chapters where pleasure was rarely named and focus on orgasm was conflated with pleasure, the upcoming section provides a comprehensive exploration of pleasure.

Pleasure, Agency and Power

The experience of pleasure is an underlying assumption in discourse around sex and relationships. However, the concept of pleasure seems to be explicitly omitted from sex education, and the discourse on pleasure in Chapter 5 was limited to the presence or absence of orgasms. In contrast, the episodes highlighted in this chapter are infused with expansive discourse around pleasure that prioritize self-knowledge and agency in an exploration of "what feels good". This is connected to, but expanding beyond, sexual

pleasure. Most importantly, the critical analysis of power as it relates to pleasure is integrated throughout the discourse.

The following subsections explore the relationships between pleasure and power as was illustrated in Chapter 2. A critical structural analysis of capitalism and the loss of power is presented below, followed by subsections of reclaiming power and then the consensual exchange of power.

Capitalism and the Loss of Pleasure

The episode of *Sexology* titled "Saying yes to pleasure" features guest Dalychia Saah, a co-founder of Afrosexology. Dalychia integrates a critique of capitalism as she discusses the way in which our lives are structured to actively deny pleasure:

> And this is not a new concept, this was Karl Marx's critique of capitalism. He said it doesn't leave room for leisure, it doesn't leave room for the feel-good moments, for the pleasure. That when we're constantly understanding our value or worth, our purpose, as how are we contributing to the productivity of society, It makes us feel really disconnected from leisure (Maoli, 2019a)

The culture of capitalism structures society around productivity which extends to the way we understand what *is of* value, and what *is* the value or worth of our bodies and ourselves: echoing back to the experiences referred in the sex mis/education. This impacts the way in which "feel good" moments of pleasure or leisure are valued, and who has access to them. The bottom line of these messages is that inherently we are not enough:

> We're not thin enough. We're not tall enough. We're not rich enough, all of these
>
> things that this model is also a part of capitalism, right? This message that we get
>
> is that there's something inherently wrong with us (Maoli, 2019a)

Internalized messages of "not enough" become motivation to increase productivity as a

path towards increasing self-worth, and as a measurement for judging the worth of others.

Self-policing extends to the policing of others and justifies limited access to basic needs.

The following segment from *Queer Sex Ed* introduces the way capitalism is

operationalized to justify or further systems of oppression:

> Another problem is when you look at a capitalist system; or you look at a system
>
> where things that are needed for survival are set up as competitive goods or as
>
> markets or things you can purchase,
>
> Oftentimes capital and poverty and lack of financial safety become the mechanism
>
> of operationalizing a lot of other bigotry.
>
> So a lot of the ways that things like racism or transphobia get operationalized and
>
> turned into ways to harm people is through things like denying housing, denying
>
> access to health care, making sure that people don't have equitable access to food or
>
> water or physical safety (Connell & Botsford, 2019b).

This segment names the connections of the larger capitalist structures and the

operationalization of racism and transphobia in areas of housing and food stability, for

example. The assumption that if you are participating in capitalism you will be rewarded

with the financial means to access food and housing is further supported by the

assumption that access to shelter and food must be earned. However, the deeper

assumption that accompanies "it must be earned" is that anyone who has not successfully

accessed these things has failed at an individual level, and thus, is unworthy. In reality, it
is the adherence to the rules of cis/heteronormativity, and the underlying white
supremacy and colonizer mindset, which dictate a hierarchy of who is allowed to access
such "privileges." This may become the motivation behind self-policing at the individual
level and whether an individual feels they have earned time off or a pleasurable activity:

> Dalychia: And I think the other piece of it is, like the focus that people have that I
> have to earn this. So I see my colleague that like I've seen so many clients were just
> burnt out. So now I earn the kind of this indulging in this pleasurable activity,
> thinking as a human being, we deserve to experience pleasure. And that is a part of
> that message of like, not enough, you have to do something to be seen as enough.
> (Maoli, 2019a)

Capitalism impacts our general relationship to pleasure through the message we have to
"earn" that time off, that fun activity, that day of doing nothing. Dalychia illustrates the
way these messages are received from all angles, are internalized, and then manifest into
cycles of not being good enough, about denying something that feels good, or is fun,
relaxing. We perpetuate "not enough-ness" in this cycle of denying ourselves, or
"indulging" ourselves:

> And so it gets really hard to feel like 'I can do this thing that makes me feel really
> good'. Because we're so caught up in like trying to be the standard that society
> has set for us. Instead of just being like actually this thing this was really good to
> me and I want to do it and all those messages impact our relationship to pleasure
> (Maoli, 2019a)

Dalychia highlights how our culture pushes us to "keep doing" with the ubiquitous end goal of having a monetized product. She uses a reflexive example of when she took up the creative avenue of pottery as a hobby and almost immediately began having thoughts of how she might incorporate this activity into her life by creating revenue from it. The host validates this feeling by sharing how when she took up bicycling as a form of self-care she felt it was both good exercise and relaxation until she began creating ways to "compete" with herself and to create evidence of "productivity" by careful tracking of her progress on a newly purchased fit bit, and documenting her mileage on map images to share on social media. This conversation felt incredibly relatable to my own experiences and to the reported experiences of my clients over the past 20 years. The theme is that we are constantly in our heads about what is a good use of time and what is "productive" and "efficient" (Maoli, 2019a).

The perpetuation of commodifying experiences has an impact on self-worth, relationship to our bodies and sense of agency. This section highlights the cycle of producing with the goal of just being "good enough" which encourages continued collusion in systems of oppression. The default becomes a loss of pleasure as well as the disconnection from body and a lack of agency. These later two areas are presented with the following sections in that order.

The Cost of Capitalism: Disconnection from Body

The culture under capitalism which prioritizes productivity and commodification is sustained through the cycle of working toward being "good enough." External becomes internal; the norms that are created from such a culture are rendered invisible, but the cost is a disconnection in relationship to the body. As Dalychia explains:

There's just so many messages that we're getting. And so all of this I was

disconnected.... And the messages are coming externally. And a lot of times they

because they're just coming constantly, constantly, constantly, they become

internalized, and they become our norms. And we, if we're not aware of them, that

we end up cutting ourselves off from our bodies from our desires, to in order to do

things that feel like for other people, it looks worthwhile (Maoli, 2019a)

When external messages are invisible, implicit or unnamed, they can become

internalized. Dalychia explicitly connects the links from internalized messages of not

enough leading to the disconnection from one's body for the sake of external validation.

She then echoes back to the data on sex education and experience of shame and guilt

related to one's body and desire:

I think a lot of us feel the same way because we've been taught to feel shame

about the things that we desire and about our bodies. also thinking about like, you

know, especially living in the states that we live in a culture the historical

relationship with Christianity, it's like the separation between like the body and

the spirit is seeing the body as bad and the body desires as bad (Maoli, 2019a)

Further complicated by the puritanical values of Christianity that are embedded in the

culture of the US, the body becomes separate from the "spirit" and the object to fight

against in order to maintain or obtain worth and value in the matrix of oppression.

Dr. Maoli (host): And our body is just so disengaged (Maoli, 2019a)

The disengagement of our body becomes the default for how we function in our world

and structure our daily lives. The ongoing need to 'earn' pleasure is accompanied by a

cycle of guilt and shame:

> Dalychia: So even the way that we say like guilty pleasure, I hate that we say
>
> 'guilty pleasure'. Why do you feel guilty about the pleasure? Why do we not have
>
> 'pleasure pride'? But it's such a common thing to be like, oh my gosh, I like took a
>
> day to myself and I feel so bad about it (Maoli, 2019a)

The external pressure and resulting internal shame and guilt is constant across episodes.

In large part, this guilt is necessary on the individual level for continued buy in to a

system that doesn't benefit the individual. As introduced in Chapters 2 and 3, the

literature on critical discourse analysis asks "is the problem being examined necessary for

the power structures to exist?" (Wodak, 2001). In the case of capitalism and the loss of

pleasure, the answer is unequivocally yes. While this will be discussed further in Chapter

7 and can be seen throughout the remainder of this Chapter 6, the upcoming section

specifically illustrates the loss of agency in the maintenance of systems of oppression.

The Cost of Capitalism: Stolen Agency

In contrast to what was implicit in Chapter 5, the loss of agency and external

ownership of pleasure is made explicit in the episodes of this Chapter. Pleasure is at the

hands of someone else, there is no agency or ownership of a woman or femme's

sexuality. These concepts were also echoed throughout Chapter 4.

Connected to the concept of the heterosexual script that was outlined in Chapter 2,

Dalychia illustrates an example of the cultural socialization of such scripts:

> And how like people who are socialized to be women have been conditioned to
>
> think that their pleasure is for our presumed hetero male partner, right? (Maoli,
>
> 2019a)

Ongoing messages that place ownership of, or access to, pleasure to an external source,
such as a partner, have disproportionate impact on people who are socialized as women
in our culture. The expansive use of language used in this quote allows for the
conversation to be inclusive of listeners and experiences outside of cis/heteronormativity.
This expansive position continues as Dalychia extends the external ownership beyond
presumed partner to the relationship itself:

> "[clients say] 'it's important for my marriage or for my relationship', and the
> pleasure belongs to their relationship, and you're just so disconnected and how it
> feels in their body, how beneficial it is for them.
>
> And I think ironically, that hurts the quality of like, sexual experience that they
> have with their partners (Maoli, 2019a)

The presumed ownership of sexuality is primarily to the cis man, and then to the
relationship. However, this is often one of the main contributing factors that impacts the
quality of sexual experiences in the very relationships to which we prioritize. Dalychia
expresses the common experience of being socialized as a woman can come with the
assumption that sex is only meant to be pleasurable for the cis man partner:

> Because everyone, from my friends, to my family to media as someone who
> identifies and was socialized as a woman, everyone was telling me that like sex was
> 'not really pleasurable for me that it was for my partner' it was for my presumed
> male partner, that like it was about making him happy that if I didn't give him what
> he needed, he was going to go somewhere else. It was about 'when did he orgasm?'
> It was about all like that, like the men are the ones who are sexual and that I as a
> woman, I'm not (Maoli, 2019a)

This quote reflects themes in the previous Chapters 4 and 5 of erasure of cis women's sexuality, cis men-centric ideas of pleasure/orgasm and the underlying coercion of "if I didn't give him what he needed he was going to go somewhere else" (Maoli, 2019).

This section connects the lack of agency and outside ownership of pleasure to the motivation for engaging in a sexual relationship to prevent a partner from "going somewhere else." The threat of abandonment reinforces feelings of "not good enough." When engaging in a sexual activity for the sole benefit of another person becomes the norm, there is no room for true consent. There seems to be an invisible coercion coming from structures outside the relationship. In contrast to Chapter 5 where "advice" reinforces these dominant cultural narratives, the information in the sex-positive podcasts provide deep reflection, guidance, and challenging of systems of oppression to increase critical consciousness as opposed to providing a prescriptive step by step.

<div align="center">**Reclaiming Pleasure**</div>

Masturbation: Illegitimating Sex

The conversation of tension between external messages and internal desires for pleasure extends to the concept of masturbation. Dominant cultural narratives around masturbation contain the same cycle of shame and guilt:

> They were hiding it. We were trying to be quiet. We didn't want people to find out
>
> (Maoli, 2019a)

In other words, pleasure is something to be ashamed about, especially pleasure for the sake of pleasure. This is further perpetuated by cis/heteronormativity and the legitimacy partner sex, particularly if a penis is present:

I hear from my friends and from my clients when they talk about masturbation as a

form of less than partner sex. So it's a placeholder until you, you are having sex

with someone else (Maoli, 2019a)

Dominant cultural narratives around what is 'legitimate sex' positions masturbation as a

'placeholder' and erases the function of accessing pleasure and connection to one's body.

What constitute legitimate sex or legitimate relationships, as in what was illuminated in

Chapter 4, does not prioritize connection to self, others, or pleasure. Dalychia expands on

the messages of legitimate sex:

I thought masturbation was like fake sex because it didn't involve somebody with

the penis or somebody else. I didn't value my own body, I didn't understand that my

most important sexual relationship was going to be the one to myself. I didn't know

that (Maoli, 2019a)

Dalychia is reflecting the messages of compulsory heterosexuality, which was outlined in

Chapters 2, by naming that when a body has a vulva, legitimacy of a pleasurable

experience is based upon the presence of a penis. Furthermore, what dominant culture

dictates as "normal" is that self-worth and importance is found outside of oneself.

Dalychia states she "didn't understand that the most important sexual relationship was

going to be the one with" herself. This is an important lesson many people do not have

the opportunity to learn, partially because systems of oppression carry power by

reinforcing the disconnection with self and body. Dalychia discusses masturbation as one

avenue of owning the power of one's pleasure:

 And so when I finally found myself to orgasm, I was like, Oh my gosh, I can do

this for myself. I don't need [a partner] to do this. Like I don't have to wait for

anybody else to make me feel good. I don't have to wait for or depend on anybody

else to bring me pleasure, which so many of my friends were like if it didn't work

[if a woman didn't have an orgasm] it was like," Oh, they [the partner] didn't do it

right." And it was all it was always like putting our pleasure, our power, all of that

in the hand of someone else (Maoli, 2019a)

The power that Dalychia found in accessing pleasure for herself allowed her to challenge

the notion that she must "wait" for someone else to give her pleasure, or that her

experience and power is owned by an external relationship or partner. This quote also

includes the statement of "he didn't do it right" that was illuminated in Chapter 4 which

is meant to place blame on the presumed cis male partner, but functions to reinforce "he"

has the power, control and ownership of sex and pleasure. Dalychia continues by

connecting agency and access to pleasure with her individual health and self-care:

I think it can be absolutely different experience in a sense that you're giving the

pleasure to yourself, you are taking care of yourself. And I think it's can be very

powerful part of self-care for everyone. It is so powerful (Maoli, 2019a)

The experience Dalychia describes is in direct opposition and challenging of dominant

narratives that alienate everybody (outside of a cisgender male experience) from self-

worth, power, and agency. While masturbation is not the only avenue for reclaiming

pleasure, it is one of the many avenues of pleasure that has been targeted by systems of

oppression, religion and the medical fields. Her interview around masturbation does not

prescribe a technique for every person to follow, as was common in Chapter 4 and 5, but

encourages self-exploration, reflection and understanding of one's body. The following

subsection continues with exploration of the power that comes in reclaiming pleasure.

The Power of Reclaiming Pleasure

In opposition to the capitalist values of production and the subsequent cost of disconnection from body, there is power in reclaiming pleasure. Though not yet a part of dominant cultural narratives, the power in reclaiming pleasure has been written about for decades, notably in the field of Black feminist thought, including the work of Audre Lorde (1984). As has been illustrated throughout this research, the current dominant cultural understanding of sexuality, gender and relationships is inherently unhealthy. In service of 'producing', the cycle of capitalism does not encourage individuals to do, or connect to, what is healthy for their bodies or mind. Dalychia introduces the work of Audre Lorde and the shift towards feeling:

> Audre Lorde the use of the erotic is the one of my favorite essays. she talks about the power of the erotic, she talks about how, you know, living in an oppressive society so, or the society we live in, is constantly asking us what are you doing? What do you do? What do you do? and our erotic asks us to ask ourselves, how are we feeling? How are we feeling? How are we feeling? And so if we tune into that feeling that ...it's like how did it make me feel? It made me feel good as a goal. And I think we live in a society that emphasizes doing over feeling. And so pleasure and eroticism is really getting us back to like, what are the things that make us feel like our authentic, full loving or erotic, curious, playful selves? And how can we just do more of that? (Maoli, 2019a)

Connecting to "what am I feeling?" is in opposition to the messages of self-worth based solely on "what am I doing?" or producing. Dalychia and Audre Lorde ask us to consider what can be different if I am the source of my own pleasure? What does it look like if I

can be authentic in my life as it relates to pleasure? What kind of shift will that create?

This shift to self as a source of pleasure and power can be revolutionary.

> When you really get to the point of like, or you get to the place that you're like, I
> am enough and just like exactly as I am, I deserve all of it. It like, It really shifts
> your focus (Maoli, 2019a)

The quote reflects this small shift in understanding can have big impact in every aspect of
life, including the very sense of self-worth, which extends far beyond concepts of sex and
sexuality. This experience of transformation is echoed in several podcasts (Connell &
Botsford, 2019a; Gurza, 2018a; Gurza, 2018b; Lauriston & Domino, 2019; Maoli,
2019b,).

The hosts of the podcast *Secret Lives of Black Women* express the transformative
power they felt after having an open conversation about sex and sexuality at the end of
the episode "Sex and power". They acknowledge that just a simple conversation can be
transformative:

> Charla (host): I think it's a super important frontier. It's so important. I think the
> Word of the Week is power as far as I'm concerned. Sex is power. And being able
> to even think about it, even you know, in a free way, the more freedom I have to
> even think about it and imagine myself being a sexually free as possible makes
> me feel super powerful (Lauriston & Domino, 2019)

Charla expresses the freedom to even think about sex in an open and free manner has
made her feel powerful. If sex is power, Charla is highlighting that she has previously not
been given access to this power:

Charla (host): Being decisive and deliberate about making yourself pleasured or

like making yourself happy through pleasure. To me I think is revolutionary…

being able to be like, "this is what I want sexually" That's power to me, because

I've never been able to do that. I've never been able to have no shame in saying

'This is what I want. This is what feels good this is what I want. I want to be

pleasured (Lauriston & Domino, 2019)

The experience of having never been able to communicate or express desire around

pleasure without shame is echoed throughout this research and the podcasts. The

affirmation that accompanies reclaiming power and pleasure can also benefit our

communication with partners:

it's affirming that we deserve pleasure is affirming that we can give ourselves

pleasure, we don't have to depend on anybody else for it and is learning helping us

to learn about ourselves in our body so that we're better able to communicate to

other people what it is that we need (Lauriston & Domino, 2019)

Learning to say "yes" to ourselves and accessing pleasure is much larger than having

orgasms. Moving away from orgasm as the only goal and valuing the experience of

something that feels good is also echoed throughout the podcasts in this chapter.

Another example of finding power through a shift in understanding occurs in the

Queer Sex Ed podcast. In response to caller question about difficulty with orgasms and

partners, the hosts encourage listeners to decenter the orgasm and consider the way they

think about sex and interacting with their body:

Sara (host): But it might also be that you're kind of just coming at the problem from

only one direction,

Jay (host): Which may or may not involve coming [shared laugh]

Sara (host): But maybe you need to shift to the way that you're thinking about sex

or the way that you're interacting with your body (Connell & Botsford, 2019a)

They point out that the way in which dominant culture teaches us to understand sex and our bodies may require a shift in understanding. As opposed to one example in Chapter 5 where Dr. Laura suggested the caller should have sex for the benefit of the marriage regardless of her own desire or experience, the hosts of *Queer Sex Ed* provide guidance that Dr. Laura's caller would also benefit from hearing. They provide another example of challenging dominant culture understandings of sex by moving away from what are you doing to what you are feeling and discuss the concept of queering pleasure:

so queering pleasure means that we don't just think about it in terms of genital

contact or erogenous zone contact or erectile tissue contact- which there's a lot of

that all over our bodies- or particularly sensual touch or sexual touch .Its like the

decentering all of that and really thinking about what is it that feels good for you?

What is it that you want to explore? What is it that you want to heal? What is it

that you want to navigate with yourself and or with other people that you can

negotiate consensually? (Connell & Botsford, 2019a)

Similar to messages from Dalychia's quotes, the shift from thinking about "doing" can be very connected to our capitalist culture, which prevents us from considering how we are feeling. In this example, reclaiming ownership of pleasure means prioritizing what feels good to you individually, pushing boundaries that the only consideration or opportunity for pleasure is found only in erogenous zones and erectile tissue of the genitals. Prioritizing the individual experience of what feels good also means navigating what you

can negotiate consensually with others when the activity is not solo. This example

highlights the way that a focus on self is not synonymous with coercion of others, as

dominant cultural narratives support and imply. The empowerment of self extends into

relational domains and beyond, as Lauren from *The Secret Lives of Black Women*

expresses below:

> It's like, in life it's all about making choices that make you feel good, and I'm
>
> really excited to go on with the rest of my day and take that power with me. Yeah,
>
> I'm excited to be in the world with this feeling (Lauriston & Domino, 2019)

Being in the world with a sense of empowerment and making choices that feel good has a

power that extends beyond sex. This discourse in this section highlights how having a

sense of self-worth and agency can shift an understanding of what is "normal" or

"expected" in relationships with self and others. If pleasure has ownership outside the

relationship, as dominant culture explicitly claims, then the confusion and shame that

accompany experiences of injustice or oppression can be internalized, shielding the

systems from view, and thus allowing them to maintain power. This could be illustrated

by considering the previous dominant cultural narratives explored in Chapters 4 and 5 of

slut shaming, rape culture, and the nondisabled cis men domination of

cis/heteronormativity.

Under the strict guidelines of cis/heteronormativity and the rigid but conflicting

rules of legitimacy, experiences of negotiating pleasure and power with oneself or with

partners is not encouraged. As presented in Chapter 2, experiences that are considered

"kinky" or kink are especially pathologized, criminalized, and at the very least, seen as

suspicious in dominant cultural narratives and psychology. The implicit and explicit

power exchanges that are ubiquitous in cis/heteronormative narratives are never named,

and often coercive. However, in addition to reclaiming self-pleasure, explicit and

consensual power exchanges with partners can be transformative. The following section

outlines the experiences of kink as transformative and healing in connecting to self and

others.

Kink and Power Exchange

The topic of kink, BDSM, or kinky experiences was present across the

aforementioned podcasts. The high occurrence of kink discussion alone could be

considered challenging of heterosexuality and heteronormativity based on the historical

and cultural context of typical versus "atypical" sexual behaviors and interests. Even in

the podcasts which did not meet standards for inclusion in this chapter of sex-positive or

liberatory findings, the mention of and conversation of kink was not framed in negative

or pathologizing discourse. For example, in one episode of the *I Do: Relationship Advice*

Podcast, the guest interviewed focuses on the healing that can occur through accessing

individual and couples retreats that focus on elements of kink and BDSM such as

consensual power exchange, and the use of professional sex surrogates (Kosterlitz &

Kosterlitz, 2019c). However, that particular conversation did not acknowledge the ways

in which class, race, and disability allowed for access to such services to be considered

"healthy" and "healing" versus criminal and pathological for all involved. In contrast,

the discourse presented in the following section discuss kink experiences that are

assessable without the expensive price tag of a tropical retreat. These conversations also

frame kink and BDSM explicitly as liberatory and transformational for those involved.

In the episode of *Sexology* titled "Cultivating positive body image using BDSM"

the host interviews licensed clinical social worker Elizabeth "Liz" Newsom, LCSW. Liz

presents how exploring BDSM and playing with power exchange can be a powerful

avenue for self-care and healing as well as establishing a positive relationship with one's

own body or increasing positive body image. She provides an explanation for power

exchange and highlights the fact that all relationships include some sort of power

exchange, though rarely acknowledged:

> Liz: So BDSM is really all about power exchange, even when you're doing it by
>
> yourself. As silly as that might sound, but the power exchange is beautiful and
>
> divine. And that, you know, and one of the big things I like to do is normalize
>
> power exchange and BDSM, because if you think about it, I'd be willing to bet
>
> money, nobody listening to this podcast, can identify a relationship where there is
>
> zero power exchange, there's always power exchange. So it's just kind of taking
>
> that and really defining it and being very intentional about that. (Maoli, 2019b)

Every relationship has some sort of power exchange, though in the dominant cultural

norm, or cis/heteronormative relationship, these power exchanges are rarely intentional,

rarely made explicit, and as a result often harmful. The rules on what kind of power

exchange is "socially acceptable" seems to be a moving target, and changes with

historical and social context. Therefore, the intentional and transparent naming and

defining of power and the specific and detailed negotiation of power exchange, inherently

disrupts the systems of oppression that are considered "normal" or typical in dominant

cultural narratives of relationships. In addition, the negotiation and collaboration with

partner/s or oneself, makes the goal of pleasure and connection explicit. These points are

reflected in the discourse on kink experiences as healing and transformative which are

explored further in the section below, and in depth in the upcoming case example from

Andrew Gurza who reflects on his experience of being queer and disabled (Gurza, 2018a).

Kink is Identified as Healing and Transformative

Examples of the way that kink and BDSM are beneficial include the way in which many practices engage all of an individual's available senses into a sexual and/or sensual practice and can be a great source of mindfulness and confidence building (i.e. Connell & Botsford, 2019a; Gurza, 2018b, 2018a; Moali, 2019a, 2019b). These include accounts of kink practices providing relief from social anxiety, as escape from chronic pain or illness, and create potential community for people who feel isolated. Liz Newsom presents one example while discussing one clients experience:

> she went from somebody whose social anxiety really immobilized her, which was
>
> complicated because of her career, she really needed to be able to go out. But
>
> because she was gaining confidence in what she was doing [through negotiation
>
> and power exchange] It was sort of spreading into other avenues [of her life]
>
> (Moali, 2019b)

Liz reports that for her client, the benefits of gaining confidence through kink spread from her relationship with herself and partners, into other areas of her life including career. Liz continues to explain that skills of communication and consent that are prioritized values of in kink, and the skills developed through negotiation has benefits for communication in other areas of life:

> To successfully navigate BDSM you have to be good at communicating, it sort of
>
> forces you to and learning, you know, being able or learning how to have

dialogue, and hear people, and be very clear and concise about what it is that

you're doing can be incredibly empowering. (Moali, 2019b)

This quote acknowledges an underlying process of communication and being clear and

concise about what one is doing are skills that people develop. These become

empowering particularly because they are in opposition to the dominant cultural norms

that have been presented throughout his research of erasure, lack of agency, and silence

that are pervasive and "normal" in relationship to self and others. Sara from *Queer Sex*

Ed echoes the experience of kink as healing and empowering:

I will say again, this is one of the reasons I said that kink has been more healing

for me than anything, and figuring out the things that feel good and affirming for

me. And using those to explore some of these other parts [of life/relationships]

has been really helpful (Connell & Botsford, 2019a,)

Sara builds upon the previous quotes of queering pleasure and expanding the

understanding of pleasure, bodies and self has allowed her to explore things that felt good

and affirming for her. As a trans woman, affirming experience of pleasure through kink

provided a path for exploring other areas of life and parts of herself. These experiences

of kink as transformative carry the theme of disrupting normative concepts and

consistently remind the listener to expand their own thinking and limiting ideas of sex

and pleasure:

BDSM is not necessarily about sex. Power exchange is not necessarily about sex.

There are multiple ways to play that do not involve sex at all. Pleasure does not

have to equate sex (Maoli, 2019b)

> Kink does not even have to necessarily involve touch. So there's ways to explore
>
> what that looks like that can be negotiated at all levels of touch and contact and it
>
> all different parts of the body, which is one of the really amazing things about
>
> kink (Connell & Botsford, 2019a)

This kind of expansive permission is in stark contrast to cis/heteronormative narratives
and rigid definitions of legitimacy. This extends to expanding ideas on what kind of
relationship is necessary for kink play, or sex in general:

> The other thing to just remember in all of this is that there's no particular
>
> relationship that's required for you to play with anyone or frankly, to have sex
>
> with anyone. So whatever that looks like, whatever kind of level of sharing of
>
> physical intimacy or kink intimacy with you feels good, and it's all consensual
>
> and negotiated and everybody's on board. There's no pre requirement for any
>
> particular kind of emotional, romantic or sexual connection. And although there
>
> are many people who really only want to do kink within a context that also
>
> includes other sexual activities are fucking it doesn't have to be. In fact, a lot of it
>
> isn't (Connell & Botsford, 2019a)

By expanding the definition of what relationships are "required" for an experience of sex
or kink to be valid, this quote highlights the presence of consent and transparent
negotiation as the priority. This quote also expands possibilities for intimacy and pleasure
to exist (and be valid) beyond sexual connections, and the distinction of romantic
connections to also include emotional connections, and the absence of these connections.

Permission to prioritize pleasure and exploration of one's own body is in direct
opposition to systems of oppression and cis/heteronormativity. This is especially true for

abject bodies, or bodies that are deemed "out of bounds" in dominant cultural discourse, including disabled, fat, chronically ill, and aging bodies, to name a few. The following section is an extended sample from a podcast presented in the form a case example. This section focusing on the experience shared by the host of *Disability After Dark* and his exploration of kink in combating ableism (Gurza, 2018a).

A Case Example: Kink as Combating Ableism

The podcast *Disability After Dark* is hosted by Andrew Gurza, who describes himself as a "Crip content creator." The episode provides a rich description of Andrew's experience as a disabled gay cisgender man. Like many of the examples in this chapter, Andrew leans into vulnerability and authenticity, providing a sex-positive conceptual analysis and evidence of his critical consciousness. The introduction to the podcast incorporates his ability to subvert power and the playfulness that he brings as a host. This quote is formatted as if in bullet points to better communicate to the reader the tone and inflection of the speaker:

> Hey everybody, thank you so much for clicking on this brand-new episode of the podcast, *Disability After Dark*: shining a bright light on sex and disability.
>
> I am of course your host Andrew Gurza,
>
> your thick cripple…yeah, that's dirty.
>
> Your disabled boyfriend experience.
>
> Your disabled, heartthrob, crippled content creator.
>
> I'm a number of different things to you and maybe your man crush for your crip crush Friday.
>
> I'm all the things.

But anyway, I'm excited you're here. And I'm excited to start this brand-new

episode with you. So let's do it right now (Gurza, 2018a)

This introduction celebrates Andrew as a disabled man and positions his disabled identity

as sexy, playful, as a "heartthrob." In communicating that he is "a number of different

things to you," he challenges the compulsory able-bodiedness embedded in

cis/heteronormativity. Another bold and powerful example of subverting power shows up

when Andrew is preparing to introduce the topic of the episode:

So you've heard me talk about my kinks on the show a little bit. You've heard me

talk about how I like to wear harness. You've heard me talk about some of the

things that I really enjoyed doing sexually in bed, you've heard all those things, but

I haven't really confessed something to you something that I'm just coming to learn

about myself that I wanted to share with the disability after dark audience. And so I

have a little bit of a cripple confession for you if you will. Get ready.

This revelation is pretty explosive and groundbreaking, just like when I cum

(Gurza, 2018a)

Andrews statement of "just like when I cum" not only positions him as a sexual being but

places him in an active experience of an orgasm which he connects to being

"groundbreaking and explosive" read: viral. This challenges the dominant cultural

narratives of disability and the erasure of sexuality in disabled people. He goes on to

share what the confession is with the listeners:

So my confession is I'm into puppy play (Gurza, 2018a).

Andrew dedicates this episode to "coming out" about his enjoyment of puppy play and

introduces listeners to the concept and its connection to sexuality and disability. To

summarize, Andrew explains to listeners that he was first introduced to the concept of

pup play in a previous relationship when his partner began affectionately referring to him

as a puppy and using pup as a term of endearment. Andrew orients the listeners to the

concept by describing it as part of a kink or BDSM scene that he found as a subculture

for gay or queer men, although pup play is not limited to gay or queer men. He describes

ways in which a puppy persona can manifest in a consensual dynamic of role play as a

puppy and its human, or handler, which he states can include all of the things that may

come for the listener who may picturing what it is like to interact with a puppy, including

playing on all fours, obedience training and belly rubs for instance (Gurza, 2018a). He

continues to explain how pup play has been experienced to be beneficial in providing

balance and relief from daily stressors:

> And some of you are like, 'Oh, so it's basically dudes being acting like dogs.'
>
> And yeah, it can look like that. But I, as I'll explain, I think it goes a bit deeper than
>
> that. Everything I'm reading about the pub headspace says that in order to be a
>
> puppy, you have to relax and to let go. And to be a pup means that you can be
>
> liberated from the day to day stresses of your life. And I found an article on
>
> pride.com that [explains] the pup headspace is extremely liberating. And they say
>
> that most people live stressful lives, balancing their schedule, navigating traffic,
>
> trying to save money and go to the gym five or six times a week. My pup
>
> headspace is a chance to break away from all that (Gurza, 2018a)

As with other forms of pleasure, the pup headspace is a chance to break away from daily

stressors. He goes on to describe the way he connects pup play to being disabled:

So people are saying that being a pup allows them to just relax and to let go and I

think this connects really well to our ideas of disability and ableism and for me

being a disabled pupper, a pup with disabilities, it allows for me to let go of all the

ableism that I'm constantly dealing with all of the shame and anger around my

disability that I carry sometimes, all of the fear that I'm going to be rejected, all of

the fear that I'm too much. Being a pup allows for me to not have to worry about

that so much and just like go and enjoy the moment (Gurza, 2018a)

Andrew builds upon the common desire to escape from day-to-day stressors of "work,

traffic and the gym" to include the weight and stress of ableism and the subsequent

shame and anger that he carries from it. His pup persona facilitates the ability to enjoy the

moment with less fear. Despite these benefits, Andrew explains the internal tension he

examined in connection to this kink, and dominant cultural narratives around ableism and

capitalism:

So I fought super hard for my independence in my life and my autonomy,

especially as a wheelchair user who needs so many things in my everyday life, I've

fought really hard to be seen as an independent person, and as somebody who can

do things for themselves and is completely self-reliant (Gurza, 2018a)

He identifies that self-reliance and independence were an important aspect of fighting

against the assumptions of disability and being reliant on others. He explains his

reluctance to discuss his interest in a specific kink due to the dominant cultural narratives

about kink and disability:

So the idea that I would be connected to an animalistic persona, or seen as less than

human in any way felt sort of kind of troubling. And I wasn't really sure if I should

be engaging with this kind of kink, because one of the thoughts that I had, and still

sometimes continue to have is that people think oh, naturally, Andrew might be into

this kind of play because he's a deviant. He's disabled and therefore…of course he'd

be into this because his disability makes him a deviant or something and makes him

more animalistic. And you know, people think that disabled people are hyper

sexualized all the time (Gurza, 2018a)

Dominant cultural narratives of "animalistic" and deviant behavior, particularly

connected to being hyper sexualized, are at the other end of the contradictory binary of

dominant culture that promotes "erasure of sexuality" or assumptions of asexuality and

disabled people. On an individual level, this can contribute to debilitating shame and self-

doubt. For Andrew, the dominant cultural mythology threatened his willingness to

embrace the pleasure, joy and fun of this extremely adaptive avenue:

So I didn't really want to initially connect myself with [pup] play because I didn't

want all that mythology around sex and disability to pervade this new identity that I

was trying on to see how it felt for me, and so I was really concerned about even

calling myself a pup and I remember when I realized what it was, I said to that

lover of mine; we you know, we don't hang out anymore; but I said maybe you

shouldn't call me that like maybe we shouldn't do that and here's why and I laid it

out, but I remember feeling really uncomfortable about it. So, so I mean even

recording this right now is a big deal (Gurza, 2018a)

Andrew is showing his vulnerability and willingness to share his process with the

listeners. He acknowledges that his discomfort was in reaction to ableism, and he was

willing deny himself the pleasure and possibilities of a pup persona because of the

potential threat of additional ableist mythology used against him. Also, important to point

to in this quote was his willingness to discuss that with a partner. In his account of a past

partner, there seems to be an implicit ability to discuss critical analysis in relationship

here, as opposed to Chapter 4 where basic levels of communication are implied to be

lacking in the experiences of speakers and listeners. Therefore, there is an implication

that perhaps the ability to understand the structural analysis is also connected to an

increased ability in quality communication with partners.

Andrew provides a rich illustration of ableism and the strength of oppressive

messages in dominant culture. He is clear in stating that kink communities, and queer and

trans communities are not immune from ableism. He also highlights how ableism

becomes more apparent when the discussion turns to sexuality or sex for disabled people,

and specifically for him as a queer person and wheelchair user:

> So part of that is that sexual ableism and internalized ableism rears its ugly head
>
> when disabled people enter kink communities like this. And that's a testament to
>
> how strong our beliefs and feelings about sex, and normalcy and how they really
>
> come out when we start talking about sexuality and kink, especially around
>
> disability. So I struggle with the idea of already being seen and read as queer and
>
> disabled and as a wheelchair user, and now I'm going to add being a pup to that??
>
> Like, how many more labels and things can I add to my identity to make myself
>
> less normal and less, kind of, falling in with the with the crowd, you know?
>
> So I did struggle with like, oh, you're going to be a pup to now, great. Just let's add
>
> that under the pile of things that make you different. How do we deal with this?

That's definitely something that I continue to struggle with as I come out publicly

as being part of the pup community as a disabled person (Gurza, 2018a)

Once again, Andrew models self-reflection and vulnerability as he describes the tension

between ableist "normalcy" and his desire to explore pleasure through this new world of

pup play. Although the following segments will highlight his intensely powerful and

positive experience once he embraced pup play, he states in the preceding quote how he

continues to experience fear of judgement as he is coming out publicly with his story. He

echoes some of the experiences highlighted earlier in this chapter such as being present

and finding agency:

Going into my persona as a pup with disability allows me to be way more present

and allows from for me to go into moments with a sense of excitement and joy and

want, where and when I want (Gurza, 2018a)

He states he is able to be present and have a sense of joy "where and when I want"

(Gurza, 2018a). This short quote includes agency, consent, autonomy, connection, joy,

excitement and mindfulness. This seems like a good definition of sexual health. In

addition to pleasure and relief from day-to-day stressors, he continues to discuss the ways

that he is able to embrace being disable and being a pup at the same time:

A lot of times when I, when I think about my disabled identity, I am thinking about

so many different things and about all the structures that are around that.

And pup play allows for me to just be disabled and be a puppy at the same time.

And it brings those two worlds together in a way that's kind of awesome. And

really, really fun (Gurza, 2018a)

Andrew provides several examples about the intersections of his experiences with puppy

play and disability:

> It allows me to be a 'palsy pup', and to connect disability and kink together in a
>
> way that's really, really cool. Palsy pup sounds kind of hot though, too, right?
>
> I'm just thinking out loud here. But also when I talked once on the podcast about
>
> how you know having an accident and with your partner may not be the sexiest
>
> thing ever, maybe in pup play, that can relax a little bit because sometimes
>
> puppies have accidents and maybe we could look at it as a way of allowing for
>
> disabled things that might happen that are super embarrassing, to be seen as more
>
> okay, and to be seen as all right if they were to happen (Gurza, 2018a)

Acknowledging and normalizing the potential for and occurrence of uncomfortable

moments is extremely powerful and painfully absent in dominant cultural narratives

about sex and sexuality across the board, but perhaps more so when an individual's

identity or experience is erased from the narrative completely. He continues to provide an

example where he feels limited by his wheelchair use but has reframed this limitation to

be strength in pup play:

> And I feel like as a disabled person, there is not a lot that I can do for you
>
> physically as a wheelchair user, I can't like, I can't necessarily run over and be there
>
> for you physically, but I can provide support and lend an ear and just be there for
>
> you to have all your emotions. So I feel like as a therapy pup, that's definitely what
>
> I feel like I am as power puppy (Gurza, 2018a)

He has reframed his experience and found that pup play allows him to address the

invisible and concrete structural barriers in his life. As expressed earlier in this chapter,

his ability to embrace his sexuality and disability through pup play has extended into areas of life outside of sex or sexual relationships.

In response to this "coming out" episode, Andrew received letters from listeners who also expressed the benefits of pup play and their gratefulness for his willing ness to share. The following section includes a letter was shared in a follow up mini episode which highlights the transformation that one listener experienced.

Kink as Self-Care

In response to his coming out episode, Andrew dedicates a separate mini episode to reading a letter from a listener who shares their story and experience with pup play and being disabled. The listener identifies themselves as pup Ori. They write about the relationship between the handler and pup in puppy play, highlighting the high level of communication skill and ongoing self-reflection that occurs to negotiate the play and to meet larger goals:

> Pup Ori: And with lots of discussion with the handler, we found ways to incorporate the physical care I required into play. Over the next few months, I went to events, met other pups work with a handler and spent a lot of time on self-reflection (Gurza, 2018b)

Pup Ori also brings in the conversation of gender and pup play. They write about learning from an online community of nonbinary people discussing how they have felt more accepted in their gender or gender expression through puppy play and he confirms:

> Pup Ori: This has definitely been true for me. When I have a handler, I don't have to be asked my pronouns, which some days I find emotionally exhausting. Instead, my handler is asked my information. I struggled to talk to people. So this is a big

> relief for me. I get to just get by belly rubbed and not worry about gender for once
>
> (Gurza, 2018b)

The handler can shoulder the burden of the heavy moments. Additionally, these exchanges could also provide modeling and exposure for exchanges that are not represented and portrayed in daily media or interactions, which can increase practice and confidence in engaging in these exchanges. Additionally, Pup Ori connects pup play to their ability to embody self-care:

> Pup play gave me an excuse to sit or lie down without feeling more self-
>
> conscious. It kept me off my feet. It gave me a reason to wear padding and play
>
> on mats that are good in my joints. And when I'm in the midst of a bad pain flare,
>
> I had people who were happy to just feed me treats and run their fingers through
>
> my hair. could be an active puppet the park on the days, my body was capable of
>
> that and be a couch on in pop on the days were moving was hard (Gurza, 2019b)

In many ways, it appears that pup play provided Pup Ori with permission and comfort to accommodate themself in the ways that dominant culture norms and experiences had not. Pup Ori writes that exploring pup play allowed them to examine themselves deeper and thus, to understand themselves better. This has increased their ability to communicate their needs to others:

> I will credit [my previous handler] and puppy play for getting me to examine how
>
> [I] treated myself prior to this year. I'm more vocal about what my body needs.
>
> Because I was trained into that habit (Gurza, 2019b)

For Pup Ori, the outcomes of pup play have changed the way they treat themselves and their body, access health care, and connect in relationship with others:

These days, I see my doctors more regularly. I monitor my pain levels more

closely. I found medication helps without disrupting my sensitive digestion. I use

my cane more. And sometimes I carry with me even on days I don't need and I

don't end up needing it. Just in case. I'm living the life of a laid-back stray pup

with good pup pals. And an amazing pup brother who helps me on some of my

bad days. Even have close friends who scratch my chin and affectionately refer to

me as a puppy. When I'm not feeling well to cheer me up. Puppy play is tied

instrumental to my disabled identity, and I'm so grateful for it (Gurza, 2019b)

In other words, pup Ori is identifying how this particular kink has provided them with

access to health, wellbeing and connection that they previously were not able to

experience.

Andrew acknowledges that while pup play can connect to disability in many ways,

some people may not want to connect with their disability and may need an escape from

their experience:

Andrew: And lastly, I want to just suggest that pup play can also be a great vehicle

for those of us who may be living with disabilities who don't always want to

identify as having a disability and want to try on something new and want to try a

different identity and want to move away from disability and want to not always

feel disabled. This is not my own personal view. But I think it's important to note

that if you did want to try to be someone else and transform yourself, there have

been many moments in my experiences where I have wished about what the what

would things be like if I were different world would things be like if things were

different, and this foray into pop play might give somebody with a disability the

chance to try on a whole new identity that isn't built around disability if they

wanted to (Gurza, 2019a)

Providing this viewpoint is further evidence of nonbinary thinking and expanding space

for different experiences without judgment. This segment acknowledges the very human

desire to play with identity and escape the constraints of daily life which

cis/heteronormativity and the cycle of capitalism dictate access to.

In this case example from Andrew and the accompanying experience of pup Ori,

pup play provided an avenue to disrupt oppressive dominant cultural norms of what it

means to be disabled. Both examples identified the benefits of reclaiming pleasure and

power had extended beyond the dynamics of sexual relationships. However, Andrew also

identified that this came with high risks and the potential to feel and be marginalized

even further. In the following section, the cost of disruption is explored.

The Cost of Disruption

Despite the potential benefits that can occur when systems of oppression are

challenged and disrupted, it does not come without risk or cost. An example occurs in the

Trauma Queen podcast interview with Ericka Hart. They discuss one example of

disruption and the backlash that they received as a nonbinary Black femme:

Ericka: So I feel like this happens to everybody, but I was on my period, and I

stepped away from the toilet. And whenever that happens like…

Jimanekia: Right

Ericka: It's like you're in a squat, you're wiping yourself. right? And you still get

period somewhere on the toilet, on the floor on your leg. So there was a little splat

of period blood that fell on the ground. And I was actually in the like, quote

unquote men's room, because it was just the quick fastest one that was there. And

it's a bathroom for fuck sake. Like, who cares? So I went and then there's

somebody walked in, so I kind of just like ran out. I was like, I don't want to deal

with nobody. Um, so I ran out. But before I ran out I took a picture of the [drop of

period blood on] the ground, because I was like, Oh, that's sick. That's like kind of

dope, and I put on Twitter I was like, 'left a little present in the men's room as a

reminder that any gender can get their period.' It literally, it went viral.

Conservative news sites wrote about it, they were like 'Ericka Hart against the

white straight cis man.' I'm like, 'why?' [Actually] It didn't say it did not say cis

man, it said white man, which I'm like…

Jimanekia: That is amazing, an amazing headline.

Ericka: It was like, 'we all know that only one gender can get their periods. So I

don't know why this happened.' And everybody was like, 'Well, what about the

underpaid janitors I have to clean this up?' I'm like, but y'all are not, but you're not

dealing with the fact that a janitor is underpaid. You're just talking about underpaid

janitor, but you're not, you know, using your platform to ensure that people who

clean bathrooms get paid more, or get paid equitable wages. You're just mad about

some period blood on the ground. Right. And now what does that tell us about the

world that you are that upset about period blood in a public restroom that has piss

and everything else all over the floor, and janitor has to clean the floor anyway.

Like, they're not going to look at the bathroom and be like, 'oh if it wasn't for that

tiny speck of blood I wouldn't need to clean this today,' No, they have to clean it

every day.

Ericka: Twitter and the internet is all about deflection. It's all about like, how can I

spin this to make you look bad because I'm not willing to deal with the fact that is

true, that you came into the sacred space called the men's room and disrupted

gender (Eborn, 2019).

In response to a simple and originally unintended disruption of gender, the backlash was

great. The sudden concern and compassion for the janitor only occurs in response to and

opposition of a Black nonbinary person disrupting the "sacred space" for cisgender men.

The shallow concern for economic and wage inequality is a common deflection tactic to

protect the hegemonic power of cis/heteronormativity. They use the janitor as proxy for

their outrage because they can't say what they really mean, which is 'stop f-ing with

whiteness/gender/sexuality'.

This backlash is "permitted" and perpetuated on a daily basis in our culture.

Ranging from macro/microaggressions and online verbal violence to state sanctioned

murder. It is not in the past. The current day and legacy of harm has not been sufficiently

acknowledged at a cultural and systemic level. For change to occur, it is necessary for

legacies of harm to first be acknowledged, and for large scale cultural and individual

accountability to be prioritized. The following sections outline the legacy of harm that

was present within the podcasts sampled, and by no means is an exhaustive account of

the harms that have been perpetuated against BIPOC; particularly Black people; disabled

people, queer and trans people or other marginalized communities.

The Legacy of Harm

As outlined in Chapter 2, sexuality and gender have historically been the site of

oppression and violence particularly against Indigenous people and Black people. In

addition, medical fields, including psychology and psychiatry, have played a large role in

this oppression and have deeply benefited from the exploitation and experimentation on

Black bodies, among others. In the *Trauma Queen* episode, Mx. Hart references the

intergenerational trauma that results from centuries of anti-Blackness and the exploitation

and experimentation on Black bodies, and how bringing those stories to light can be a

step in the healing process:

> I've had a lot of healing around gender and also race for me too, because it's so
>
> connected. I think learning about the experiments of J. Marion Sims and Lucy,
>
> Anarcha and Betsy; learning about Henrietta Lacks, learning about Saartjie
>
> Bartmaan; which are all figures inside of the sex ed world, or at least they should
>
> be, I positioned them there, because their bodies were just used as experiments.
>
> And that's something that I have loved learning about and have gotten so much
>
> healing from because we carry that trauma. You know, and I definitely have trauma
>
> around my vagina, I have trauma around my uterus, and my cervix and my vulva,
>
> and that's from trauma that I have personally experienced, but that's also trauma
>
> that I have carried from the things the ways in which this country has related to
>
> Black fem bodies, Black uterus carrying bodies, you know that is what they just do.
>
> It's like second nature. And those are the stories that I have, those are the have
>
> presence, And that's not all the stories. So I have gotten a lot of healing from
>
> talking about that and storytelling and telling those stories has made such a
>
> difference for me. (Eborn, 2019)

J. Marion Sims is labeled as the father of gynecology, and the knowledge he shared was

gained from doing torturous experiments with no anesthesia on Lucy, Anarcha and Betsy

who are now referred to the mothers of gynecology. Henrietta Lacks is the Black woman

whose DNA is the source of the HeLa cell line, the first immortal cell line. Saartjie

Baartman, sometimes referred to as Sarah Baartman, is the South African Khoikhoi

woman who was objectified through the European gaze for her body proportions and was

"displayed" in the freak show circuit of the 19th century. The derogatory stage name

assigned to her was the "Hottentot Venus."

Speaking truth to power about the inhuman and violent treatment of Black femme

bodies is vital if there is ever to be true accountability or healing. The intersection of

femme and Black remains the most dangerous intersection throughout history and today.

Mx. Hart says "that's just what they do" – "they" meaning white cis men, but also just

the dominant white culture as a whole. To rephrase the previous point made by the *Queer*

Sex Ed hosts, the systems of oppression continue to operate even when white,

heterosexual, cisgender men are not "in the room" (Connell & Botsford, 2019a). It was

also highlighted that many people hold multiple positions of privilege and oppression,

and the experience of harm through systems of oppression does not prevent the same

individual from perpetuating systems of oppression or harm on others (Megatron &

Melvoin-Berg, 2019). The example of white women which was introduced in Chapter 1,

2 and Chapter 4 is expanded on below to explore the way in which white women

specifically have weaponized their positions but have yet to be held truly accountable for

in dominant cultural discourse.

The Legacy of harm: "Can we talk about the weaponizing of white women tears?"

The concept of white women and the specific position to power and oppression

was introduced in Chapter 2 and through the analysis in Chapter 4. In this segment the

conversation turns to the legacy of harm at the hands of white women and the specific

weaponizing of white women tears.

In the episode of *American Sex*, Alex introduces the topic of white liberal women and the stereotypes and misinformation that they perpetuate. She highlights the way the North is seen as "progressive" and liberal, and yet remains incredibly segregated. White liberal cisgender women may have some understanding about their position of oppression as it relates to binary gender and sexism, however, there is typically a lack of deep understanding of the unique position and weaponizing of power that white women have employed throughout history and today:

And, for white women who kind of all they have to hold on to, is their womanhood as their like only really like, axis of oppression, is that much harder to want to let it go? I think that when we're talking about oppression, and we're talking about structural oppression and identities that inform the way we experienced oppression, yeah, clearly gender is one of those. And I think it's very easy for white women to get caught up in Oh, like, I'm a woman so clearly, like, I'm oppressed. And it's so funny because it's something that bothers me to know and whenever, especially, you know, like the, like, liberal feminist white woman, they'll say, you know, just basically blame, you know, white cis men for everything. And I'm like, '*Hey, girl, two out of those three identities are also yours.*'

…And in this country, we know that white women are afforded a level of protection that no one else is, even white men.

The event that in I guess popular culture started the civil rights movement was the murder of Emmett Till. Right? Because he allegedly whistled at a white woman

who used white womanhood to enact violence against this black child. And that's

not a coincidence even today (Megatron & Melvoin-Berg, 2019, emphasis mine)

Protecting the purity and piety of white women from the gaze and lust of the oversexed

and savage Black man, or in this case and many others, Black boy. Emmett was a 14-year

old boy who was brutally murdered in 1955. His name is one of many Black boys who

have been brutally murdered for no other reason than a perceived white threat:

And that's not a coincidence even today, Amber Geiger, the white cop in Dallas,

who walked into a black man's apartment shot him dead. That just the fact that

yes, she was thankfully found guilty of murder, but just the fact that she may not

have been and really no one had faith that she would be because she's a white

woman. And in this country, we know that white women are afforded a level of

protection that no one else is, even white men (Megatron & Melvoin-Berg, 2019)

At the time of this episodes recording, Amber Geiger had not yet been sentenced. Ken

Melvoin-Berg, co-host of *American Sex*, reminds the audience that the sentence could be

99 years in prison or as little as 6 months:

Ken: I'm not really rejoicing in the streets yet until I hear her sentence just

because, again, you know, we know how this system works. Right? (Megatron &

Melvoin-Berg, 2019)

Since the time of this recording, Amber Geiger was sentenced to a mere 10 years in

prison. Additionally, since the time of this recording there have been numerous very

public cases of white women calling the police on Black individuals and families for

existing in spaces and somehow personally offending white women by using a public

BBQ, going for runs, or asking a white woman to follow the rules and leash her dog in

public spaces. The recent mainstream discussion of this has been labeled as "Karen" but these examples have always been part of our culture and history:

> Alex: But I think that white women are very eager to bolster the systems that protect them because they know that they're protected within them. And I think that a lot of the posturing that's done with regards to, oh, the patriarchy, oh, white men are the root of all evil, quote, unquote. You know, it completely absolves them of any responsibility in perpetuating the same systems that yes, white men created, but they also created it in part to protect you, and you benefit from that. And reckoning with that history and that reality is really something that I don't think we're there yet (Megatron & Melvoin-Berg, 2019)

White women have been protected more than any other group of people, including white men. This is further discussed in Chapter 7, however, because it has also begun to be included in mainstream reporting and media over the past year it is likely the reader of this research is now familiar with the basics. Alex is calling for accountability and acknowledgement of the responsibility that white women have had in perpetuating and strengthening systems of oppression. These bolstering behaviors are something that cannot continue. Alex states that she doesn't think we are collectively at a place where white women can reckon with the history and reality of harm, and since the time that podcast was recorded in 2019, we have seen some initial stages of this conversation become more mainstream and vehemently denied. However, it is so long overdue, we have to be there now. Particularly concerning is the fact that white cisgender women are disproportionately represented in mental health fields of counseling psychology and social work. As a collective, we will and do continue to perpetuate harm if we cannot

understand our history and they we replicate oppression today. This reckoning must

occur if there is ever hope for accountability and healing.

The following segment further highlights the need for accountability and provides

several examples of how the speakers have addressed this issue within their experiences.

Next Steps in Moving Toward Accountability

In addition to providing critical structural analysis and challenging systems of

oppression, the podcasts in this chapter also provide insight into next steps in the work

towards collective liberation. Ericka Hart says the following:

> Ericka: So yeah, that's what I would say are a couple of things. I guess other things
>
> too, is to ensure that your work is not racist, fat phobic, classist, ablest and that is
>
> people will be like, "that's really challenging to do", but not necessarily if you are
>
> centering folks who look like that, who exist in those bodies already.
>
> I mean tha,t I mean, and it's the easiest thing. It's really easy. It's not really that
>
> hard. It's not. there's so many excuses.
>
> Jimanekia: It's really an excuse at this point. It really is. It really is. What I like to
>
> tell people they're like what about I'm like, 'Oh my god, guess what? My Google
>
> works like your Google and they're free' (Eborn, 2019).

By centering the people who exist in historically marginalized bodies or identities, Hart

and Eborn challenge the notion that it is 'too difficult' to ensure our work is not racist,

classist or ableist.

On an individual level of accountability, Hart highlights the need for ongoing

assessment of values, unlearning, and "gathering yourself":

> Ericka: I would also just say read, like a lot of your values are probably going
>
> unchecked. Even as a sex educator that's been doing this for 10 years, I still have
>
> values that I have to check and consider and gather myself.
>
> So how are you gathering yourself? We do a lot of gathering of other people. But
>
> how are you checking in with yourself like, Oh, that's not cool that I have that
>
> thought and how are you un-learning that? (Eborn, 2019)

Willingness to acknowledge that anti-oppression and anti-racism is a process that

involves ongoing work, and often includes making mistakes, is echoed and modeled

across the episodes of this chapter.

In response to a question from a listener who is struggling with internalized shame

and growing up in a sex-negative environment, Sara from Queer Sex Ed draws on her

own experiences and provides a provides a beautiful example of how a commitment to

critical consciousness and anti-oppression does not prevent negative oppressive thoughts

or self-doubt and shame:

> And that's something that happens a lot, where it's like, I know that I actually
>
> shouldn't have this racist thought think this sexist thing have this anti kink belief or
>
> anti sexuality, belief or whatever, but still in my body, my body's reaction is still
>
> revulsion or frustration or inner hatred or anger or whatever else is coming up. And
>
> it doesn't mean that those things are great and that we should never deal with them.
>
> But I just want to validate that, like, that's an experience I have a lot, like I'll say to
>
> Jay, 'in my mind, I can understand that I'm not a failure, and that I'm doing things
>
> that are okay. But in my body, it feels like I'm a failure, and I can't get rid of that
>
> feeling right now' (Connell & Botsford, 2019a)

For Sara, acknowledgment of the internal thought can contribute to an understanding of where it came from, often being the sex-negative culture that was reinforced by parents or teachers. Reflecting on this is part of identifying the barriers to being where she wants to be:

> Sometimes just acknowledging that can be the first step to really working through this kind of stuff and being like, so where I want to be is here: I want to be sex-positive, embracing of myself and others and non-judgmental about sexuality. I know I can be there because I've been there before, right? Or I've had pieces of that happen in my life (Connell & Botsford, 2019a)

Sara illustrates that the process of dismantling the way we may have internalized oppressive systems is not binary. However, the responsibility of dismantling oppression must be taken seriously by each of us, especially those with privileged identities.

For Ken, the cohost of *American Sex*, identifying and reflecting upon positions of privilege also means using that privilege and any platform that accompanies it, to "pass the mic"

> Ken: Because I am white, I am cis, I am hetero, I have military privilege. I even have tattoo privilege, like I can get away, with literally [anything]. And because I have a larger platform than a lot of other folks… What I am doing is I'm simply taking my privilege and passing the mic and I'm shutting up and letting Lizet (Alex) talk and that's exactly what today is about. This is me, passing the mic shutting up in - right now (Megatron & Melvoin-Berg, 2019)

The hosts of *Queer Sex Ed* remind the audience that from the position of privilege that

comes with being white, we cannot expect people of color, particularly Black people, to

continue to do the labor of critique:

> It's our responsibility as white people to bring that lens to our work and our
>
> understanding and the history of our movement instead of expect people of color to
>
> critique it, oftentimes in a way that they get punished for get pushed out of
>
> organizations for so the responsibility is on us as white people to ask, What am I
>
> missing? What am I not understanding, not on people of color to continually
>
> explain how we're falling short? (Connell & Botsford, 2019a)

The theme of reducing the labor on BIPOC, and Black people specifically, is highlighted

in several episodes of this chapter:

> Alex: There are people out there that have been doing the work that are doing the
>
> work currently, and like finding them reaching out to them, and learning from
>
> them, instead of asking people of color to do the labor for you is important.
>
> Because when a white person knows something, or is an anti-racist, it's because a
>
> person of color's already taught them what they need to know, nine times out of
>
> 10 or that information again, has trickled down throughout the years.
>
> I try not to put too much faith into any privileged person when it comes to, you
>
> know, figuring it out 100% because we all do, we all fail, we never get it right all
>
> the time. But I think instead of just kind of …defensiveness, I think just starting at
>
> the resources that already exist, and working from that can help tremendously
>
> (Megatron & Melvoin-Berg, 2019)

These quotes highlight the need for white people and people in privileged positions to

seek out the wisdom and knowledge through resources that already exist including

connections within our own community that have already been deeply engaged in the

work.

In this section of next steps in moving toward accountability, the themes of

"doing your own work" and as Ericka Hart said "gathering yourself" by engaging deeply

with learning the intersections and interconnections of systems of oppression and

domination through personal work. This work includes reading, listening, and often

stepping aside to share positions or platforms with people who have different social

locations than we do. The most important theme here is the responsibility for additional

labor to be placed on the person who is less impacted by systems of oppression. And in

addition, the work always includes ongoing personal reflection and interrogation of

possible blind spots as they emerge. The labor of continually being expected to educate

people on their deficit of knowledge is exhausting and something that queer, trans,

BIPOC and disabled people have been naming for decades. Paying people for their

consultation is necessary but investing in sharing the labor is vital.

Conclusion for Findings

This chapter provided discourse and analysis from the podcast episodes which

contained strong structural and power analysis infused throughout. By continuously

naming and speaking truth to power, the hosts and guests in these episodes connect the

ways that systems of oppression are interconnected and infuse everything in our society

from the meta to micro level. These podcasts modeled and named several anti-oppressive

strategies such as centering historically marginalized knowledge, ongoing informed

consent, accountability, and shared power. Throughout these episodes the speakers

consistently included the three priorities of critical sexuality studies which include

conceptual analysis, attention to abject bodies, and challenging heterosexism and

privilege (Fahs & McClelland, 2016). In contrast to the episodes included in Chapter 5,

the episodes in this chapter are unequivocally critical and sex positive. One pervading

theme is the clear and thorough reflexivity and naming of positionality on the part of

hosts and guests. This includes willingness to acknowledge mistakes and growth edges

they have encountered in themselves. By doing so, they also model accountability,

provide guidance on how to manage our own mistakes or growth edges, and dispel the

perfectionist / binary notions of "good or bad" in engagement with liberation and efforts

towards social justice.

The podcasts in this chapter were incredibly rich with information and expertise

that it was difficult to limit this chapter even to these 60 plus pages. The speakers in these

podcasts are exceptional sex educators and embody the motivation for this research by

providing alternative examples to the discourse in Chapter 5. The use of language and

conceptual analysis in this chapter illustrates that this is not about using the "right terms"

and more about the depth of knowledge and critical understanding that is behind the

terms a speaker uses. They are explicit and intentional in their communications and

demonstrate that the presence of a structural and power analysis produces discourse that

exceeds the binary understandings of inclusion or exclusion. In other words, many of the

podcasts in this research have a specific audience in mind, but differ from the podcasts in

the previous chapter that are exclusionary and not applicable to most listeners outside a

small, privileged group. Whereas the information in this chapter can be applicable to any

listeners but is also often very specific in who their intended audience is. On one hand

this may be interpreted as the usual labor that is required of people who may fall outside

of cis/heteronormativity to explain and "prove" their position, but that does not appear to

be the case in the explicit and implicit communications here. On the other hand, and

aligned with my interpretation, is that these speakers are providing us with powerful

examples of how to move towards building a shared commitment to liberation, and

examples of how we can all do better in our personal and collective healing.

Chapter 7: Discussion

This research is conducted from a critical epistemology and methodology which illuminate the ways in which power and oppression are infused in discursive practices. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) primarily studies the ways in which "social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (van Dijk, 2005, p. 349). Discourse which occurs on the micro level is often a reflection or perpetuation of the messages on the structural and institutional level (Kincheloe and McLaren, 1994). Ultimately, this research is a consciousness raising effort and a cultural critique of power at large through the intersections of white/cis/heteropatriarchy/capitalism. Theses structural and institutional messages are illuminated in this research through interrogation of cis/heteronormativity at the discursive relational level. With particular concern for the lack of sex education for counselors, this research has aimed to illustrated how the lack of attention to human sexuality is at odds with the commitment to social justice in the field of counseling.

The fields of counseling and mental health have separated sex and sexuality as a specialty niche not included in general counselor education or competency. And yet, sexuality is an integral part of human experiences. Relationships are vital to wellbeing. When a client reaches out for support and counseling, it should be reasonable that they should assume they can discuss their sexuality and relationships regardless of their "presenting problem." In my experience, clients are rarely aware their therapist may not have any training in human sexuality beyond the mis/education of the dominant cultural narratives that are embedded within cultural ideas and discourse of sexuality and gender. Also in my experience, it is the clients who have already found themselves in

marginalized positions who easily understand the implications of this, and often find

themselves treated as "special topics" at best.

Over the past few decades there has been much needed attention to intersections

of systemic oppressions and the way this manifest at a relational and individual level, yet

there continues to be a need for attention to the pathology that is passed off as dominant

culture which perpetuates the systems of domination. The sample of cis/heteronormative

narratives that were present in this research actively interfere with the ability to obtain

and maintain healthy relationships with self and others. At the very least, the

default/unexamined cis/heteronormative script is inherently unhealthy and harmful for all

bodies. Alternatively. skilled sex educators have been long been addressing these

concerns. By providing vital education and opportunity for unlearning, they continue to

blazing trails for health and wellbeing that are accessible for all bodies. They provide

strong examples for how to support an individual journey while challenging systems of

oppression. They explicitly state and understand that there can be no health of an

individual while these systems of domination and oppression remain the norm. The field

of counseling has a lot to learn from these transformative leaders and educators.

Ultimately, comprehensive and critical sex education in the field of counseling is

necessary and vital to any efforts and commitments of social justice and therefore,

collective liberation. This Chapter 7 concludes this research project by revisiting and

integrating the meta theory presented in Chapter 2 with the theoretical implications of

this work. I then explore and unpack meta reflections that emerged from the findings and

analysis, which includes the ongoing need for interrogating cis/heteronormativity and

whiteness in the field of counseling psychology, whiteness as a deficit of knowledge, and

the deep and harmful legacy of anti-Black violence that reverberates as the foundation for

current day norms and assumptions. I then discuss the implications of this work as well as

the limitations and offer recommendations for future work.

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical orientation of this work has infused liberation psychology with

queer and Crip theories and settler colonialism (e.g. Arvin et al., 2013; Foucault, 1978;

Martín-Baró, 1996; McRuer, 2006a, Morgensen, 2011). These theories are intrinsically

tied to one another by virtue of their critique of normativity, denaturalization of

cis/heteronormativity, and ableism. Additionally, these theories culminate into the

metatheory represented as the wheel of domination (Mayra, 2020) which illustrates the

interconnections and interdependence of capitalism, colonialism and white supremacy.

The wheel of domination functions behind, within, and throughout dominant culture

narratives and all systems of oppression. The integration of these theories could provide

a framework for counseling psychology to challenge the foundational theories and

models which inherently perpetuate this wheel of domination.

The wheel of domination brings attention to the structures of society and

illuminates how the individual pursuit of health is futile in a system that actually makes

health impossible (Mayra, 2020). Therefore, efforts to address health and wellbeing must

expand to include this larger analysis and understanding. Despite decades of research that

supports and understands the systemic influences of "illness" and disease, counseling

psychology has yet to integrate an anti-oppressive systemic approach to individual

treatment into our training programs. Therefore, we hold a value of social justice that

remains performative.

Mayra (2020) defines being colonized as being disconnected and disintegrated

from ancestry, earth, connection to self and to others. In fact, colonization specifically

sought to eliminate these connections in pursuit of production and capital gain. Mayra

(2020) also notes a historical connection that is not often discussed; at the same time that

colonization of what is now called the Americas occurred, Europeans were also burning

hundreds of "witches" or women who were deeply connected to land and earth. A culture

of disconnection and disintegration is perpetuated by the individualism and ahistorical

understandings that are foundational to the field of psychology. Queer and Crip theories

provide a critique of power and normativity that further illuminate the impact of

capitalism and ableist cis/heteronormativity on the conditioning of bodies and lives. This

theoretical orientation and meta theory provide a comprehensive framework for

examining how power plays a role in what is perceived as normative. In addition, this

project attempted to fill the gaps in queer theory as it relates to whiteness and the lack of

attention in interrogating normativity as inherently racist, specifically anti-Black. White

supremacy is perpetuated in any space where power and access are not readily available

to anyone who is not white, cisgender, and nondisabled (Mayra, 2020).

The work to dismantle the wheel of domination can seem overwhelming, but as

Ericka Hart and Jimanekia Eborn have stated, this is not an excuse and it really isn't that

hard (Eborn, 2019). Mayra (2020) notes small steps can have huge impact; if colonization

represents a disintegration and a disconnection, we must reconnect. We must expose the

myth of individualism, which is limited in its ability to address the root causes of illness,

and promote our differences (Mayra, 2020) The discourse in Chapter 6 provides several

solutions for integrating collective and self-determination including how to promote

consent and agency, accountability, shared power, and centering historically marginalized knowledge.

Implications for Counseling Psychology: A Meta Reflection

This research was conducted from the position of my identity as a mental health clinician and certified sex therapist who has held various roles in community mental health for over 20 years, building upon my first-hand knowledge of the lack of attention to human sexuality within the counseling field. This is juxtaposed by the rich and in-depth interdisciplinary knowledge that I have gained through the world of sexuality and sex ed which is deeply aligned with justice and equity that the field of counseling psychology espouses. Additionally, in my identity as a queer, nondisabled, cisgender white woman, I have experienced the nuanced oppression of cis/heteronormativity in my own life as well as having seen its negative impact on the overall wellbeing of my clients. Although the integration of critical sexuality in clinical training is an important step, the deeper issue, as Singh (2020) notes, is the ability for our field to integrate and practice the knowledge we gain from research and clinical experiences in our own lives as students, but also as faculty and supervisors.

As a white woman and student of counseling psychology, I have found the interrogation of whiteness in my education and professional communities to be lacking. We are asked to examine our positions of privilege and oppression, but we are not met with an environment that supports social justice and racial identity development beyond a superficial level. In attempts to center Black liberation, white counselors will often resist "with everything in them" and as Singh notes, this is not because we are inherently "bad" but because we have not adopted the practices that our own research has revealed (Singh,

2020, p, 1117). They note that there is a "literal retreat in racial identity development

where white folks resist the work with everything in them" and although we have a

plethora of research of how to deal with this in the counseling room, we don't apply this

to what happens within ourselves as counselors (Singh, 2020, p. 1117). This is further

reflected in the work of Sue et al. (2009) who documented the experiences of faculty and

students in facilitating difficult discussions such as race and managing white tears and

anxiety which perpetuates harm in the classroom.

      Of course, these deficits impact our clients, but it also causes harm for students

and faculty of color in our training programs and work settings, particularly Black

students and faculty. When speaking to perspective trans and nonbinary students who

ask- 'what kind of environment and I coming into here? Are my professors, supervisors

and fellow students well trained in affirming and liberatory practices?' Singh (2020) has

been honest and said "our programs are not safe. Our training is not sufficient. You will

experience harm. And I will give whatever shelter I can if you come" (p.1119). Singh

goes on to say:

> This is literally the most fucked up thing to have to tell a student, and even more
>
> so to bring this conversation to faculty who then would continue to refuse to
>
> integrate deep and embodied trans and nonbinary 'awareness, knowledge and
>
> skills' into our counseling psychology programs (p.1119)

These quotes ring true for many, many students, counselors and faculty who are not

permitted the "comfort of whiteness" and faced with the task of bringing these

conversations to others, particularly those in power within our programs. This

transparency and truth that Singh is modeling allows for more informed consent on the

part of incoming students, but also illustrates that faculty of color are often providing

whatever "shelter" they can in the form of support and advocacy for students and thus

immeasurable labor beyond their already stretched capacity. Across the country this is a

common discussion for students and faculty who are part of historically marginalized

communities who find their lives are presented as a "specialty" to learn about outside of

the curriculum or in an added resource meant to increase 'diversity'. We must challenge

of norms in our field *and within ourselves* which are rooted in "white-bodied supremacy,

cisgender and straight dominance, able-bodied, wealth supremacy, and more" (Singh,

2020, p 1112). And this is especially true for predominantly white liberal institutions and

groups who are already committed to social justice work. It is in these settings that it

seems exceptionally difficult to bridge the gap between talking the talk and embodying

the walk/walking the walk. It should not be optional for faculty to understand and

interrogate the way whiteness manifests in the classroom. It should be a requirement.

And so, this chapter continues with my thoughts on discussion for how this research is

aligned with these commitments and goals.

Whiteness: A Deficit of Knowledge

A predominant theme within this work that warrants continued attention is

illustrated in the following quote from Queer Sex Ed:

> And so if you're missing something, if you feel like something isn't about race or
>
> isn't about class or isn't about disability or whatever else, you're missing
>
> something, it's not that that thing isn't about it, it's that you and your own
>
> privileged understanding of the world might be lacking a wider understanding
>
> (Connell & Botsford, 2019a)

Particularly for those of us with a privileged perspective, we have a lot to learn and unlearn.

For centuries power has been masquerading around as knowledge and truth. I would like to echo the decades of critical scholars, community activists and others who have named this for what it is. Power is real and its ability to conflate privilege with knowledge is palpable. Privileged positions are deemed power and hold a particular experience, but often this experience has a very limiting view. To again paraphrase Freire (1970) and other critical scholars, whiteness does not often have enough distance from itself to have any meaningful understanding. Those who have historically been marginalized can often have that distance, and thus their perspectives and leadership should be prioritized. Additionally, the knowledge that already exists 'in the margins' can provide the answers that are often sought – but where you stand determines what you see and standing in power and privilege has a very limiting view.

In discussing their experience as a Black femme professor in higher education, Ericka Hart stated:

> And so they absolutely do not believe that Black femme presented people and Black femmes have anything of value to say, and that anything that what we're saying is actually just supposed to be our pain displayed for them. And that's it. And I have found that because I'm not doing that there is a lot of resistance to what I'm saying (Eborn, 2019)

Mx. Hart is highlighting the tendency for students, particularly white students, to discount the instruction from professors of color unless the topic is the experience of oppression and pain. In other words, unless the topic is the experience of oppression and

pain, the professor is not "believed" when they present evidence of knowledge outside

the dominant white culture knowledge base or limited understanding. I would add that

even then, it is only if the experience of oppression and pain does not require or challenge

the white student to be uncomfortable with their own experiences. This exhausting cycle

is not only harmful for BIPOC faculty and students, but also prevents us as a collective

from learning and unlearning in ways that could have deep impact in our personal lives.

"Are the straights ok?"

The question "are the straights ok?" is common colloquialism online and in queer

and trans communities in reaction to everyday interactions, conversations, or media

directed towards the cisgender heterosexual and usually white audience which include

notions of gender essentialism, heterosexism and rigid binary expectations, for example.

The rhetorical question, usually accompanied by an image or text, is a critical lens

directed at implicit and explicit notions of normativity that seem ridiculous and often

truly laughable (if not being weaponized against an 'other'). This colloquialism is one

example of challenging normativity from a viewpoint that may have degrees of distance

and thus provides perspective. As a listener to some of the podcast episodes in this

research, my internal reactions oscillated between the laughable and a deeper sadness for

those listeners who may not know these conversations are limited and incomplete. And

the answer is often; no, the straights are not ok. In the matrix of cis/heteronormativity

those who are in positions of power or privilege are not immune from suffering through

the normativity of disconnection from self, the commodification of bodies, and the

oppressive limitations of rigid binaries.

An individual doing an unguided search for information using terms like "relationship advice" or sex advice" will be met with similar search results that I had in my initial data collection process. In a new search of apple podcasts conducted in September of 2020, there are similar results to those from 2019. As examples, the podcasts *Relationship Advice/I do* and *Bad Girls Bible* come up first in searches for "relationship advice" and "sex advice" respectfully. It is reasonable to assume that if the individual searching for information identifies as heterosexual, they may recognize that they are the intended audience of these podcasts, and therefore may assume the information provided will be helpful for them. They may not be aware of the limited understanding these podcasts present. At a very basic level these episodes attempt to assist the cisgender heterosexual listener in adjusting and conforming to the unhealthy world of adult relationships instead of challenging the unhealthy norms themselves. These examples of dominant cultural narratives provide a lens to demonstrate the way in which the structures cis/heteronormativity function as a mechanism to fully align with whiteness as a structure and system of domination. What is left unsaid by the status quo provides vital information about what these norms actually are, and therefore what whiteness in this context represents.

In considering the concepts of gender and sexuality to the realm of the body, what is the status quo of the realm of the body and how does this function in the larger structural contexts? Whiteness infuses the realm of the body by promising safety and comfort. White bodies are not only "permitted" to be sexual as evidenced by images and narratives in dominant culture, but they are also permitted to feel entitled to a sense of safety and comfort. The dominant cultural narratives and understanding of gender and

sexuality are rooted in colonialism, the attempted genocide of Indigenous bodies, culture

and ideas; which extends to capitalism, slavery and the exploitation of Black bodies for

capital gain and comfort of white bodies. The invention of whiteness is bolstered by the

continuation of cis/heteronormativity as supremacy. The body is the battleground for the

dominant culture to maintain its relationship with power. Capitalism is the site of

production for what bodies are "worthy" and what bodies are disabled.

The following section continues by expanding on the cycle of capitalism and the

quest for feeling "good enough" within the context of the podcasts in this research.

The Cycle of Capitalism

Dalychia Saah of Afrosexology presented the illustration of the cycle of

capitalism (adaptation shown in Figure 7.1) during a presentation in St. Louis at the 2017

AASECT summer institute (Saah, 2017). This figure illustrates the cycle of capitalism

through which internalized messages of "you're not enough" are met with a market of

"solutions" that compel the purchase of products, leading to a temporary feeling of relief,

but ultimately does not disrupt the cycle.

Figure 7.1 The Cycle of Capitalism
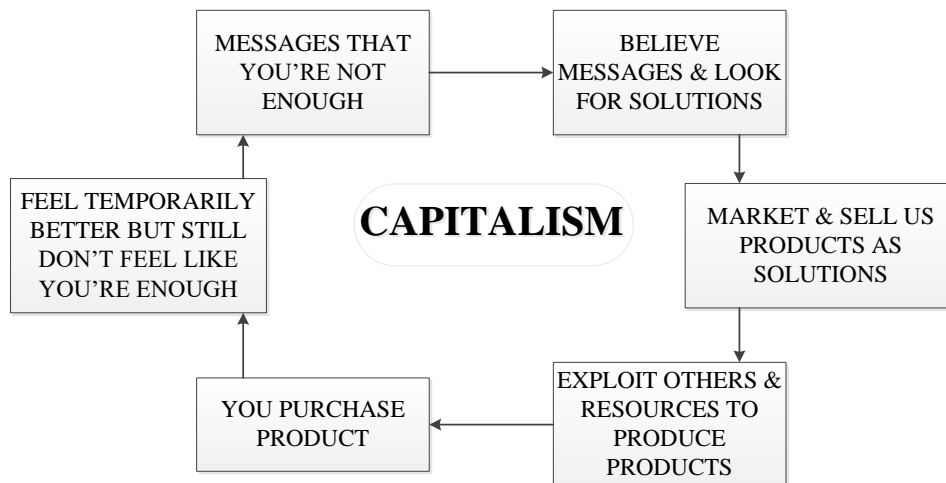
Note: Figure 7.1 adapted from (Saah, 2017)

Unfortunately, therapists and counselors are not immune from abusing this cycle for their own capital gain. The podcasts included in Chapter 5 which contain discourse that lacks a structural analysis includes *The Bad Girls Bible* (Jameson, 20019), *The Relationship I do Podcast* (Kosterlitz & Kosterlitz, 2019a), and *Dr. Laura Call of the Day* (Schlessinger, 2019a). These podcasts take the position of exploiting a problem such as "you are unhappy or unsatisfied" in your sex life or relationship by providing themselves or their services as the "answer", a clear position that answer is outside the listener, and can be purchased. These examples perpetuate and benefit from the cycle of capitalism and the deficit of knowledge in the dominant culture. There is a strong sense of exploitation here; a problem is identified (such as "a sexless marriage") and the content reinforces this is a problem versus exploring this as a concept at all, and then the answer presenting is the guest- they are the singular path to the "answers" which come at a cost. The invitation to be on these podcasts appears to be framed solely as a marketing opportunity for the guests' services or business. Therefore, the idea of "good sex" and "how to have better sex" are often the commodity "for sale" in the podcasts and discussions which lack a structural analysis. These discussions isolate individual sexual technique from the context of the relationship or individuals involved in the act of sex. The discussions that do look at the relationships and/or individuals involved, isolate these relationships from the dominant cultural context and the social norms that inform them. Therefore, in the selling of "good sex" these podcasts present a lack of vision and limiting understanding of what "good sex" means, what the ingredient choices could be, and what factors might be barriers to achieving "good sex". Ultimately, the findings of this research suggest that those who are part of the dominant culture norms of cisgender

and heterosexual could be generally unaware of the connections between their individual

and relational concerns and the larger structures and systems which prevent them from

finding solutions, understanding and the "satisfaction" they may seek.

Ultimately, this lack of connection has an important function in a capitalist

system. If the search for answers or advice yields promises from a particular action on the

part of the individual, such as the example of making sure "she cums first" as highlighted

in one episode, the individual can feel comfort in having an "answer" that they can

individually implement thus having a sense of individual control and agency in their life

(Jameson, 2019a). However, this can also perpetuate a false sense of individualism with a

spectrum of impact ranging from high levels of entitlement to deeply internalized feelings

of shame and guilt of failure. In other words, if the solution is that "she cums first" and

the relationship is still struggling, or the sale of "good sex" is not successful, then the

blame is fully on the individual. Feelings of inadequacy can reinforce a commitment to

the never-ending quest of being "good enough" while allowing the larger structure and

systems to evade detection and interrogation. This maintains commitment and

involvement in the system and cycle as the only "choice." This perpetuates the separation

of the individual from the collective, a key organizing principle necessary for sustaining

the wheel of domination.

The podcasts presented in Chapter 6 take a very different approach and offer a

higher level of knowledge and understanding. In these examples, the podcasts provide a

conceptual analysis and explanation of the larger context of the "problem" – which

includes structural, institutional and cultural factors. In other words, the "answer" to a

problem can be found without the purchase of a service or product. More often than not,

the "answer" includes deep interrogation of self and unlearning of messages and the nuanced ways they can manifest in each of us individually. The "answer" then includes doing this work and healing from the dominant cultural norms of disconnection and disembodiment towards connection, authenticity, valuing community and interdependence. These podcasts do not contain the same self-promotional goals of the first group. Instead, they provide outside resources to which they do not have financial interest in and promote the role of deeper self-reflection and understanding of contexts and systems we all live within. In these podcasts the "answer" that an individual may seek is not found in isolation, but through expansive thinking and exposure to interconnectedness coupled with increasing self-awareness and exploration. The speakers appear to be invested in information versus their services being sold. However, this does not mean that the work of these speakers should be unpaid. What it does mean is that such wisdom, knowledge and expertise of should be prioritized, well paid, and valued beyond tokenism or proximity to whiteness.

The Legacy of Harm

Throughout history and today there is consistent thread of disturbing fascination and objectification coupled with the torture and exploitation of Black women. Ericka Hart introduces the names of Lucy, Anarcha and Betsy to this research, along with Henrietta Lacks and Saartjie (Sarah) Baartman as important figures whose names and contributions that should be known and included in the field of sex education and general knowledge as a whole (Eborn, 2019). While the following section is not an extensive account of these women's stories, I take the responsibility of saying their names quite seriously. I want to acknowledge it can be deeply disturbing and dysregulating to hear

these examples, but I also want to acknowledge that the option to "look away" here is a

huge privilege, and one that many white people have exercised far too frequently.

The stories of the women presented below are only those that showed up in the

discourse present in this research. There are countless documented stories and examples

not included in this dissertation, and there are countless more we may never know about.

Each of these examples are deserving of individual and ongoing recognition and

attention. For readers who are unfamiliar I felt it important to include the following

sections to provide more information about Saartjie Baartman, Henrietta Lacks and the

story of Betsy, Lucy and Anarcha.

Saartjie Baartman

Saartjie (Sarah) Baartman was a Khoikhoi woman who was taken her home on

the Western Cape of South Africa in 1810 by a Black free man and white English doctor.

Some accounts say she went with them willingly perhaps in promise of work. She spent

four years on the stage in England where her body was displayed for money and could be

poked with a finger or stick, for a fee. Her genitals and buttocks were the purpose of the

attraction, and also could be touched for a fee. She is the best known of several Khoikhoi

women who were on display in this manner. Sarah was displayed under the name that

remains part of our cultural zeitgeist; the Hottentot Venus, the former which is an

offensive term for the Khoi people. In 1814 she was brought to Paris and sold to an

animal trainer who treated her as such and continued to put her on display for the

amusement of the white European onlooker. Her body was foundational to racist medical

science and used as evidence that Black people were over developed sexually to support

ideas of racialized womanhood, further dichotomies of 'savage' / 'civilized' and white supremacy.

When she died in 1814, her body was dissected and put on display at the Museum of Man. For more than 150 years, her body, including casts of her genitals, were on display. Although she was removed from the display in the 1970s, her body was not returned to her home in South Africa until 2002.

Henrietta Lacks

Henrietta Lacks died in 1951 in Johns Hopkins Hospital after being admitted for abdominal pain. Beginning prior to her death, doctors experimented with cells taken from a biopsy without her permission and consent. The cells from this biopsy became known as the HeLa immortal cell line and are still widely used in biomedical research today. Her cells have been used for everything from research on cancer and HIV to testing human sensitivity to adhesives in tape and glue. There are more than 11,000 patents based on her cells. That is more than 11,000 sources of income and capital in the pockets of white people. Her family decedents were solicited for years as research participants and to my knowledge have never received compensation for the immense capital gain and scientific/medical advancements that would not be possible but for Henrietta's genetic material.

Betsy, Lucy and Anarcha

The entire field of modern-day gynecology and reproductive health is rooted in the torture and exploitation of Black women and Black femme bodies. The 19th century American surgeon J. Marion Sims had accidentally discovered that through use of what we now call a speculum he could better see the vaginal area and cervix of woman. Thus,

he decided he could develop techniques to cure vesicovaginal fistula, which was a severe

and painful complication of obstructed childbirth that at the time had no treatment. Due

to the values of the time that included the racialized concept of "true womanhood"

previously discussed, white women who suffered from this condition were judged harshly

and rejected by society as it impacted their worth and ability to reproduce (Ojanuga,

1993). It was common for enslaved Black women to have this condition particularly due

to the terrible conditions of slavery and the lack of access to care. Thus, J. Marion Sims

preyed upon and exploited these women as nonconsensual subjects in his 4-year quest for

medical advancement, capital gain and recognition in his field, all of which was

considered ethical at the time.

Sims conducted cruel and brutal experiments on 7 enslaved Black women who

were offered as subjects by the slave owners. Only 3 of these women were named in his

records. Their names are Betsy, Lucy and Anarcha. They each endured numerous

surgical attempts and experiments that were all conducted with no anesthetic, but it is

recorded that Lucy was the first to undergo the full operation. This included the added

humiliation of the 12 doctors in audience who were welcomed to watch this torture. The

surgery was unsuccessful, and Lucy nearly died of blood poisoning. The next enslaved

woman to undergo this operation was Anarcha. Both Lucy and Anarcha eventually

recovered from the initial operations only to undergo continued experimentation. Four

years and dozens of operations later (sometimes cited as 13 to 30 depending on the

source), Anarcha underwent the first "successful" operation. The news of the success

traveled to the white women who sought after this procedure for relief of their conditions.

According to historical records presented in Ojanuga (1993), none of the white women survived the surgeries due to the pain.

As difficult as it is to read and write about these examples, it is imperative that history does not forget the price that Black women have paid, without consent, for the advancement of all/white women's health and the right to white comfort.

The Status Quo = White Comfort

The women presented above are only a few of the countless whose names we don't know who have been exploited for monetary gain and professional advancement of white men. Additionally, the way in which white women have all benefited from the medical advancements that resulted from torture and exploitation of Black bodies cannot be overstated. Because these things are so implicit to our current day experiences, they have become invisible to white women. Black women offered up as nonconsensual objects for the advancement of white women; the advancement of our health, of our comfort, and of our power. Additionally, the obsession with the objectification of Black women has in many ways insulated white women. It provided them/us with an "other" to separate ourselves from, and an "other" to be the object of racialized and gendered oppression and exploitation. Was there a time when this was common knowledge and not lost in history where white women were aware of the implications? Perhaps they considered- if not them (Black women) than it would surely be us. What has this knowledge required in terms of the mental gymnastics necessary to maintain our comfort?

The exploitation of the women named above resulted in medical advancements including the entire field of gynecology or the study around organs commonly called "female reproductive organs" and women's health. In the case of Henrietta, we can't

even begin to know the stretch of her influence. However, what has been lost here is far more valuable. Through the loss of consent and the loss of lives, we all lose our humanity. And then we continue to build lives at this deficit. For an example of further reading, James Baldwin addresses this deficit in his essay "being white and other lies" (Baldwin, 1998).

Sex Education and Counselor Education

The state of sex education in the United States is damaging and unacceptable. The fact that only 13 states require the information presented in sex education to be medically accurate is astounding (SEICUS, 2017). The only thing that is more terrifying than this fact is the notion that the majority of people, including therapists, are unaware of the depths of the lack of information they have been given in formative developmental years and have been exposed to through dominant cultural discourse. A lack of training in human sexuality means that clinicians have not had the opportunity to do the "unlearning" and self-reflective learning that is necessary to engage in therapeutic interactions which do not perpetuate and cause harm. Research examining the presentation and training of human sexuality in counselor education has highlighted inconsistencies across the field ranging from little to no information provided, a focus on sex-negative topics alone (such as disease prevention), or the offering of a stand-alone elective (Sanabria & Murray, 2018). Research on the impact of this lack of education has shown counselors are not only ill prepared and uncomfortable addressing sex and sexuality with client, but that they also carry strong bias (i.e. Sanabria & Murray, 2018). The impact of such bias is generally explored in the context of harm and discrimination against the LGBTQ+, disabled or BIPOC communities which supports the wheel of domination. Framing sexuality and gender as a piece of multicultural competence and

social justice work that is *only* relevant for historically marginalized communities is

deeply incomplete. The focus on those outside of normativity - or outside of traditional

understandings of heterosexual, cisgender, monogamous positions- prevents any option

for deep critique and examination of these normative or dominant understandings alone.

It is not only that cis/heteronormativity harms those outside the box- it is that the box

itself needs further examining and dismantling at its core. Ultimately therapists must be

better equipped to address the harmful ways in which cis/heteronormativity impacts the

cisgender and heterosexual communities as well.

On Sex Positivity

    In the time that this research was being conducted and written, the American

Psychological Association has announced a sex positivity special task force in division 17

counseling psychology. They propose that knowledge of sexual functioning and the

treatment of sexual concerns be included as a core competency for counseling

psychology training. This is an important development and brings sex positivity into the

larger discussion. However, queer theorists have long documented the fact that the

dominant culture will twist and turn any concept to fit its needs and agenda (McRuer,

2006b). Therefore, this is also a possibility as it relates to sex positivity and the tendency

to create rigid binaries and boxes, despite the actual conceptual definition or application.

Therefore, following the leadership of those, many of whom are part of the APA task

force, who have been immersed in the multidisciplinary field of sexology and research

that includes a critical and structural analysis is important to reduce "neutrality" or

confusion. Infusing critical sex education would mean more than an introductory

standalone course on basic human sexuality, and would include ongoing reflection and

assessment of clinicians personal and individual sexual attitudes and judgments/myths as

well as the nuance and difference of sex as in behaviors and sexuality as it extends

beyond behavior and is infused in culture (Burnes et al., 2017; Sanabria & Murray, 2018;

Zeglin et al., 2018).

Ultimately, the concept of sex positivity is not meant to be incorporated into the

existing dominant cultural narratives without being accompanied with comprehensive,

critical and sex-positive education and unlearning of dominant narratives and discourse.

Therapists cannot ethically address or hope to address "sexual concerns" without first

identifying and dismantling the inherent cis/heteronormativity that many "concerns" are

situated in relation to.

Limitations of this Research

This research is limited primarily in the wide scope of content which means that

deep dives into nuance and literature are prohibitive. It is not possible to include a

complete review or representation of the multidisciplinary research on the vast world of

sexuality and gender, and the ongoing efforts in challenging whiteness and

cis/heteronormativity. This work has attempted to include several levels of analysis:

cultural/structural, systemic, institutional, relational, and individual. Despite attempts to

include the work I have internalized over the decades, which has influenced this research,

it is accurate to assume I have missed many. Therefore, this research is not meant to serve

as a thorough overview, and instead is an example for the value of and need for

interdisciplinary work and structural power analysis to be centered in social justice efforts

and clinical training in sexuality.

The theoretical orientation and meta theory of this research illustrates the

interconnections of all systems of oppression, however, this large scope also presents

limitations in fully representing each individual system. For example, this research

discusses the racism that is embedded within cis/heteronormativity but heavily focuses on

anti-Blackness and the dichotomy of white bodies and Black bodies. The racialization of

gender and sexuality has deep nuance and implications that vary across racial and ethnic

experiences. The focus of anti-Blackness is not meant to be exclusionary to other

racialized experiences and the way racism is infused into sexuality and gender. However,

this focus is necessary given the anti-Black foundations of the United States and requires

more attention. Additionally, anti-Black racism was predominant in the data collected.

One limitation may be found then in the collection of podcast data lacking representation.

Conversely this may be also be a reflection of segregation in the dominant cultural

narratives present in the realm podcasts.

This is also true for disability and ableism. Crip theory identifies capitalism as

inherently ableist and disabling. While the ongoing interrogation of capitalism was

explicit in this work and the podcasts of Chapter 6, the analysis of data or the writing of

the analysis may be lacking in conveying the ubiquitous ableism that it reflects. An

additional limitation of this research is that the focus on the critical analysis of discourse

did not include a critical analysis of accessibility of podcasts. Though podcasts are cost

free to listeners, this limited to those who have access to internet and devices. As

previously mentioned in Chapter 3, the lack of access to official transcripts means the

nature of audible media is not accessible to a deaf audience or any audience that may

require or benefit from a visual aid.

While this choice to research utilize data that is already in the public realm offers

several benefits that have been discussed in previous chapters, one limitation of this is the

absence of ability for "member checking" and communication with the speakers present

in the podcast episodes. Analysis of discourse in naturalistic domains has been identified as an area for consideration that initiated this research and the examination of podcasts. However, this research did not analysis the advertisements that were included in these episodes. This oversight was highlighted in the process when I noticed I had missed deleting an advertisement in one of the transcripts and was surprised by the radical/sex-positive nature of it. This was also brought to mind several times when doing background research on podcasts hosts and navigating the multiple pop-up ads on websites which were selling the products or activities of the host. Anti-capitalist values are not conflicting with having a therapeutic practice that is sustainable and allows for a living wage or income. While Chapter 6 of this research does include discourse which illustrates examples of how to challenge capitalistic values on bodies, this research did not fully address or review the body of literature and work which exists in the area of anti-capitalist therapeutic practices.

The Topics of Porn and Sex Work

In this research, I did not address the topics of porn and sex work. This choice is rooted in the fact that dominant cultural discourse of these topics are often deeply uninformed, and therefore the overall goal of this research to illuminate the need to critical sex education is a precursor to any informed discussion of porn or sex work. Critiques of pornography as unhealthy must extend to understanding that mainstream pornography as a direct reflection of dominant cultural norms and therefore must address these norms as the root, not pornography as the root. In addition, the position and structural analysis of power within any existing research being cited, or future research conducted, must be interrogated.

My hope is that this work contributes to others who have shown the importance of a structural/power analysis on the implications of efforts to address sexuality and gender. Research that addresses the issues of porn or sex work from an uninformed or unexamined position can often perpetuate the dominate cultural norms. There are several bodies of work, conversations and attempts to explore these issues from a more critical position which always includes direction from co researchers and collaborations who are actually involved in these industries. This is further noted in the upcoming section on suggestions for future research considerations.

Implications of this Research

This research provides summaries of work and evidence supporting deeper engagement with values of social justice and the interrogation of cis/heteronormativity, ableism, whiteness, white supremacy, and other systems of dominance that continue to function in our clinical training programs, lives, and work with clients. In efforts to prioritize social justice in counseling fields, the integration of human sexuality through critical sex education is a crucial piece that is currently absent. The counseling world can play a role is supporting us all towards a healthier future, as it intended to from its inception, by increasing competency in sexuality as it is infused in every aspect of life. One example of this can be seen through expanding bio/ psycho/ social to include the intersections of individual, cultural and institutional factors such as in the liberation health framework (Belkin, 2014).

In building off of Singh's (2020) call for the field of counseling to take a closer look at the ways we are taught to accept all supremacies of dominance, the implications of this research could be seen as further support for challenging and interrogating the status quo as an assumed site of health or wellbeing.

Future Research Considerations

Future research should begin from the position introduced by disability justice work of "nothing about us without us" and seek to be interdisciplinary and collaborative. Additionally, future research would always benefit from seeking alignment with the recommendations set forth by Singh (2020) and briefly reviewed in this project. Understanding that the "level of scientify" (Foucault, 1978) in field of medicine and psychology is based upon racist foundations that amount to cultural value judgments which lack any actual science. In our efforts to build upon our knowledge base it is important to interrogate the assumptions of what we think we already know even when/especially when they seem to be "unrelated" to racism, cis/heterosexism, ableism, or other systems of oppression.

Efforts that seek to address increasing diversity and inclusion in counseling programs must engage with interrogating whiteness and the existing environment of faculty and students, and the commitment and skill level of disrupting systems of domination within it. This is particularly important in respect to white students and faculty. We need to talk about the white [cisgender] women issue in our country and in our field. These conversations have been happening in the margins for centuries and only recently have come into mainstream discourse but has yet to be taken seriously as topic for consideration in research and practice. Future research could explore the unique positionality and protection of white women, as well as the dangerous consequences that our position can and has created.

In future work that utilizes discourse from the public domain including podcasts, attention to advertisements could be quite interesting. The examination and analysis of the choice of products, language of adverts and underlying "need" for such products

would be an area of inquiry that might provide further uncovering of the dominant

cultural deficit and potential locations for liberatory practices.

Future research can benefit from the expansive interdisciplinarity work that has

not been prioritized in our field; for example, queer Black feminist thought and

Indigenous feminist studies among others. Efforts directed towards examining the

dominant cultural deficit from the perspective of the liberatory knowledge base could

provide valuable information on how to better support health and healing in ourselves

and our clients.

Conclusion

The life domain of sexuality as vital to collective and individual overall wellbeing

and health. Critical sex education is crucial to a commitment to social justice and efforts

in addressing systems of oppression and dominance. In the matrix of

cis/heteronormativity there is a long list of historical and ongoing harm and violence

directed towards communities who are most impacted by systems of oppression. The

dominant cultural norms of sexuality and gender is also at odds with any understanding

of health, mental health, and anti-discrimination standards that are set by out governing

bodies. In addition, those who are in positions of power or privilege are not immune

from suffering through the normativity of disconnection from self, the commodification

of bodies, and the oppressive limitations of rigid binaries. It is reasonable to conclude

from the analysis of this work that dominant cultural discourse in the form of

"relationship advice" or "sex advice" including those with licensed clinicians, may not

address the cultural, systemic or institutional factors that impact experiences on the

relational or individual level. Therefore, clinical discourse can reinforce unhealthy and

unhelpful cultural norms and myths, which in turn contribute to further harm against marginalized communities.

Previous research has identified the need for clinical education to address the gap in knowledge of human sexuality as a whole, to move beyond basic information of sexual issues and to prioritize personal reflection and understanding of bias and experiences to achieve clinical competency (i.e. Cruz, Greenwald, & Sandil. 2017). Research has also highlighted that in the rare occasion that sexuality is addressed in current training programs, the focus is sex negative and does not include healthy sexuality (i.e. Sanabria & Murray, 2018; Wiederman & Sansone, 1999; Zeglin et al., 2018) . Previous research has proposed several models and frameworks for infusing critical sexuality and sex education into clinical training, including the competency domains used by the American Association for Sexuality Educators, Counselors and Therapists (Zeglin et al., 2018). Efforts to address this gap in training must be grounded in the multidisciplinary work from the fields of critical study which share the commitment to interrogating and understanding the way power and privilege operate and their role in historical and current day harm and violence (Fahs & McClelland, 2016; Teo, 2010). The lack of attention to critical sexuality education prevents clinicians from meeting the needs of a client's whole person and increases the likelihood of clinicians perpetuating harm.

Ultimately, critical consciousness raising and promoting critical sex education serves the commitments Singh (2020) outlines in their "top 10" next steps, specifically: [a] decolonize and re-indigenize counseling psychology; [b] center Black liberation in everything we do; [c] name, interrogate, and unlearn internalized whiteness; [d] uplift liberation of Black and Brown trans women and nonbinary communities; [e] recognize

the patriarchy is harmful and has lasting effects; [f] find ways to live in our bodies more; and [g] know that another world of liberation is possible and then build this within counseling psychology (Singh, 2020).

These priorities focus on work that will ultimately extend to better serving our communities and clients but must first be put into practice within ourselves as counselors and within our field and training. It is my hope that this research project has illustrated that critical sex education for counselors is deeply aligned with these priorities and can serve as a crucial piece of building a counseling psychology of liberation. The realm of sexuality and gender are infused throughout our culture and intersect with all systems of oppression and dominance, thus providing space for interrogation, unlearning, and potentially deep healing that we all are in need of. My hope is that in our collective work to dismantle these systems, we engage deeper with the interrogation of cis/heteronormativity and the priorities that Singh outlines in building a counseling psychology of liberation.

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